This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

1.50 9 m

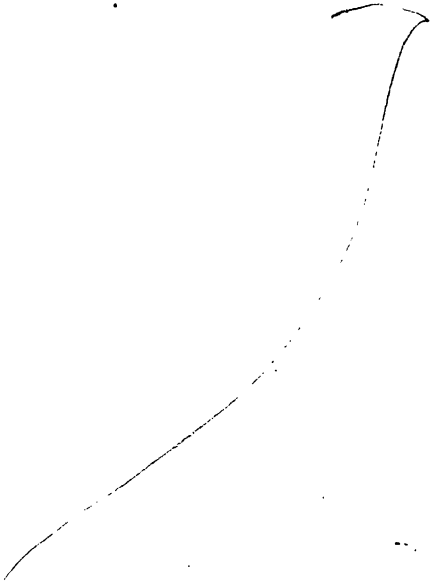
Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google
Gavin

Digitized by Google

MICHAEL FREEBERN GAVIN

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY

ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
R L

Digitized by Google

© JAMES T. WHITE & CO.

W. F. Carn

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

M. Egan

Digitized by Google

MICHAEL FREEBERN GAVIN

A BIOGRAPHY: EDITED BY HIS SON

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
CLARENCE JOHN BLAKE, M.D.

PRIVATELY PRINTED AT THE RIVERSIDE PRESS
CAMBRIDGE; MDCCCCXV

Digitized by Google

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
766854A
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
R 1935 L

COPYRIGHT, 1915, BY ELLEN T. GAVIN

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC
LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	INTRODUCTION	ix
I.	ANCESTRY AND CHILDHOOD	1
II.	EDUCATION. MEDICAL STUDIES	11
III.	FURTHER PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION	21
IV.	EARLY PRIVATE PRACTICE	30
V.	LATER PRIVATE PRACTICE	40
VI.	BOSTON CITY HOSPITAL	54
VII.	OTHER PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS. WRITINGS	63
VIII.	SUMMARY OF DOCTOR GAVIN'S PROFESSIONAL CAREER	77
IX.	BUSINESS AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES. HOME. RECREATIONS. LIBRARY.	95
X.	HIS CHARACTER	114
	EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS	131

34 DE#9 A

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

MICHAEL FREEBERN GAVIN, M.D. *Frontispiece*

DR. GAVIN AS ACTING ASSISTANT SURGEON, U.S.N. 1863 16

DR. GAVIN AS FIRST LIEUTENANT AND ASSISTANT SURGEON, U.S.V. 1865 26

DR. GAVIN AT THE TIME OF HIS MARRIAGE IN 1876 42

HOUSE OFFICERS OF THE BOSTON CITY HOSPITAL IN 1865 54

DR. GAVIN'S SURGICAL SERVICE AT THE BOSTON CITY HOSPITAL IN 1903 60

DR. GAVIN IN MIDDLE LIFE 84

IN CAMP AT "THE BIRCHES" 104

LETTER TO MRS. GAVIN 132

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

INTRODUCTION

To no man in any walk of life is there given a larger opportunity for personal helpfulness than to the physician: his touch with the vital concerns of his fellows is the more immediate, and the more directive, because the condition of the relationship is distinctly personal; barriers fall away before the pressure of a need, entitled because of its individuality, as well as because of its companionship in common welfare, to the help it seeks.

As the custodian of painstakingly acquired knowledge, at the disposal of whosoever may be bettered by its application, the physician holds an enviable place in the community, and finds in it ample opportunity for the outgiving of such qualities as are evidenced in kindliness, helpfulness, encouragement, and the gentle and discriminative presentation of the truth.

The ability to make just and continued application of such gifts, to supplement the lack in other lives by remedies other than material merely, bespeaks the possession of a fund of wholesomeness, of a sane appreciation of the beauty and the goodness of life, and of a sympathy illuminated by the desire to pass on these acquisitions.

Digitized by Google

Of such sort was the man whose name this volume bears, — its contents the testimony of his own recorded well-lived life, and the tributes of his family and friends, gathered in loving memory by his son.

To have centered all of one's best possessions upon a useful purpose, to have brought to bear upon this all of one's best characteristics, to have put aside self in order to follow duty in the light of a reverent faith, is to have lived and wrought as did our friend.

CLARENCE JOHN BLAKE, M.D.

Digitized by Google

MICHAEL FREEBERN GAVIN

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

MICHAEL FREEBERN GAVIN

CHAPTER I

ANCESTRY AND CHILDHOOD

MICHAEL FREEBERN GAVIN, the son of John Gavin and Mary Freebern Gavin, was born at Roscommon, Ireland, on the twelfth of May, 1844. His father, John Gavin, a carriage-builder by trade, came originally from County Galway, but later moved to Roscommon and established his business there; and there he married Mary Freebern, who was of Scotch descent and whose father, Robert Freebern, had been an officer in the English army and had fought under Wellington at Waterloo. Here, at Roscommon, a family of nine children, five boys and four girls, was born to them, to bless their long and happy union. Of the five sons, Robert, the eldest, remained at home to carry on his father's trade, while the other four — Michael F., Patrick F., John H., and George F. — departed, one by one, for America, where, with a striking unanimity of choice, each of the four

Digitized by Google

in turn selected for his profession the practice of medicine.

Michael Freebern Gavin was the fifth born of the nine children and spent the first twelve years of his life in Roscommon, where he received his early schooling at the convent of the Sisters of Mercy. Here the foundations of his education, including the rudiments of Latin and the classics, were thoroughly laid, and here the deep underlying religion of his nature, first of all established in his home, must have been fostered and developed. Here also in his birthplace, in some degree, perhaps, from his books, but doubtless to a far greater extent from his surroundings, he acquired a love for Ireland and an interest in her welfare which endured throughout his life.

Nor is this to be wondered at: for the little town of Roscommon, though numbering only two thousand souls, has played a part of no small importance in the history of the nation. Viewed merely from a modern standpoint, it is noted for its flourishing trade in live-stock and in agricultural produce; and it is moreover the county town for County Roscommon, so that here are held the assizes, and, alternately with Boyle and Stokestown, the quarter sessions.

Turning from the present to the past, one strikes at once deep to the roots of Irish history, and

Digitized by Google

enters a land of saints and priors, of soldiers and princes, a land rich in memories of

> Old, unhappy far-off things
> And battles long ago.

For it was to this spot that Saint Coman came, as early as the sixth century, to found the monastery of Canons Regular; and after him the town was named, since Roscommon in the Irish tongue means the Wood of Saint Coman. The name of the Saint, however, is not all that is left to recall to the people of Roscommon the history of their town. There remain also the ruins of the Dominican priory founded in the middle of the thirteenth century by Felim O'Conor, Prince of Connaught, son of Cahal of the Red Hand, which still reveal, in spite of mutilation and decay, traces of the skill of architects and builders of those early days. The near-by Abbey of Boyle, a celebrated Cistercian monastery founded in the twelfth century and richly endowed, is another excellent example of the culture of the past. It was long known throughout the country as a seat of learning, and there were composed the *Annals of Boyle*, authentic records of ancient Irish history. Roscommon was always noted for its learning and for the fact that its monasteries persisted in maintaining their Irish superiors in the face of violent Norman opposition.

Digitized by Google

If the priories thus bring to the mind thoughts of religion and of peace, there stands near by, on the outskirts of the town, a reminder of ancient strife in the ruins of the Anglo-Norman castle founded in the year 1268 by John D'Ufford, Justiciary of Ireland. Thrice during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries this castle was besieged by invaders, and finally, after the battle of Aughrim in 1691, it was partially destroyed and burned; yet portions of its walls remain, and from its slope of rising ground it still looks down upon the plain below, defying time and change.

All these memories of Roscommon's former greatness must have played their part in forming Michael Gavin's early impressions, and in instilling in his heart the love he always felt for his birthplace and his interest in his country at large. In later years he refers to "the good old town of my birth. My senses are as warm to its residents and its welfare as if I still paraded the main street and held forth in Abbeytown." For Ireland and for her people he had a lasting fondness. Miss Katherine E. Conway, the authoress, says of him: "Like all noble-hearted men of Irish blood, he loved his native land and was well informed regarding her history." His library contained scores of books on the subject of Ireland. The standard Irish histories, dealing with both ancient and mod-

Digitized by Google

ern times, volumes covering all periods of special interest, the old Irish sages, religious works, geographies, biographies of statesmen and patriots, fiction, poetry, folk-lore, — many of the volumes autographed, — everything was there, in fact, of interest to the student of Ireland and of Irish affairs. Though never ostentatious in his interest, Michael Gavin never forgot his native country and her people, and his hopes were always, as Miss Conway again expresses it, "for a practical realization of her dreams."

Mr. James E. Cotter, a friend of later years, aptly phrases his thought in saying: "He was both an intense and patriotic American, but at the same time always a loyal Irishman." His life in this respect recalls to mind that consummate artist, son of "the heather and the wind," who wrote in distant Calistoga, —

> From the dim shieling on the misty island
> Mountains divide us, and a world of seas;
> Yet still our hearts are true, our hearts are Highland,
> And we, in dreams, behold the Hebrides.

One of Michael Gavin's strongest inherent traits was his love for, or rather his devotion to, his parents. This love was a very deeply rooted part of his nature and endured undiminished by separation or time. In a letter written by him in 1876, years after he had left Roscommon, when he was

Digitized by Google

successfully established in his profession in America, he says: "I have a letter to write to my dear Father before going to bed to-night, and the pleasure it gives me to do so, is only equalled by seeing him or getting a letter from him. To me it always appears that I am still young and a child, while I get letters beginning with the affectionate 'My dear child,' or 'My dear Boy.' To many, such a feeling might appear childish, but I am willing to act the child under these circumstances." And on another occasion he writes: "I often think of the great pleasure it always afforded me to sit down and chat with my father. Those who knew my father when he was young often tell me that I resemble him very much. No small compliment, by the way."

Although his mother died when he was young, her memory was always fresh, and treasured in Michael Gavin's heart. To quote once more from his letters: "There are some songs which my mother was in the habit of singing, that whenever I hear them sung it is with the greatest difficulty that I can keep back my tears. She was particularly fond of the old Scotch ballads, some of which are really beautiful. My old friend, Mr. Grant, was in the habit of playing many of them for me, and although they make me sad, it is a sadness that brings with it all the endearing qualities of the

Digitized by Google

best of mothers." Again: "There are times when I find myself reverting back to the time when my mother would sit down in the evening and read stories for us, riveting our attention to every word she said and making us feel as if we were the actors in the story and not the hearers. There are some of the home scenes, which have such an attraction for me, never to be effaced."

In reviewing later Michael Gavin's life, character, and ideals we must not, therefore, forget the effect that this feeling of love and respect for his parents must have had upon him, and the unclouded, deserved devotion they commanded from a nature such as his should be given due credit for the greatest influence on his later development.

Having thus glanced at some of the direct factors which tended to shape and develop Michael Gavin's character, there remain to be considered other influences of race and ancestry producing certain racial characteristics, which he possessed in a marked degree. First, he was distinguished for his geniality, for that which has been termed the "sunniness" of the Irish nature. It was not, however, that effusive, somewhat strained geniality which some men assume as a distinct manner, to be put on or laid aside as the occasion may demand; but with him it took the form of a kindliness so quiet and restrained, that most people meet-

Digitized by Google

ing him for the first time possibly failed to appreciate the qualities of heart and brain which lay beneath his unassuming exterior. This kindliness had, moreover, the great quality of being lasting. In the homely but expressive phrase, he was a man who was "always the same," equally to be relied upon in a desperate crisis, or in the quiet round of everyday life.

A second racial quality of Michael Gavin's was his domesticity. While he was distinctly a broad man, who read widely and had traveled much, who mingled freely with all classes, and studied them from varying viewpoints, yet despite his many activities, when all of his outside work was over, he turned instinctively and unerringly to his home. He was in no sense of the word a "club-man" or a man who cared for public life. The simple domestic ties, the companionship of wife and son and daughter, the pleasant familiar chat with friends, the quiet of his library, — these were the things Michael Gavin prized. To quote his own words, "The more I stop at home the greater my love for home becomes, for at home I can always find something to learn."

Thirdly, he possessed an Irishman's ingrained veneration for religion, fostered and developed, first, by an ideal Catholic home, and then by his early education; and while in this respect he was

Digitized by Google

again unostentatious, yet his life was lived with a firm belief in, and reliance on, a beneficent Creator, who ordains events for the best, and in whom is to be found consolation.

Lastly, Michael Gavin possessed that typical Irish trait, so hard to express in a single word, but which might be called alertness, or a delight in life.

It was this love of life, this unquenchable joy in experiencing its daily miracles, which so strongly characterized Michael Gavin. He never wearied of the great pageant of the world, was never for an instant bored by it. He enjoyed nature to the full: flowers; the blossoming trees in the springtime; the summer skies; the woods; the ocean. In one of his letters he minutely describes the coming of two swallows to his garden, and their home-building there. He had his work, his family, his friends, his books,—a thousand and one interests to fill his busy days. "I cannot see," he writes, "how people can live and be happy, without constant occupation of mind and body." Inactivity, the wasting of precious moments, was perhaps the one thing he could not endure. He lived his life to the full.

Thus, from an outline of his birth and parentage, a faint portrait of Michael Gavin begins to emerge; the picture of a man genial, affectionate, high-minded, and sincerely religious, the picture of a

Digitized by Google

man whom many of his friends have sought to remember by terming him, "In the best and finest meaning of the words a true Irish gentleman of the old school."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER II

EDUCATION. MEDICAL STUDIES

AT the age of thirteen Michael Gavin came to America. Some years before, his sister Mary had married Patrick Morris of Roscommon, and shortly after their marriage they had left Ireland for America, where Mr. Morris established himself as a druggist, on the corner of Federal and Purchase streets in Boston. The business prospered and the Morrises, realizing that opportunities for success were greater in the new world than in the old, sent word for Michael to come and live with them. Accordingly, in 1857, he crossed the ocean alone, and for the next few years made his home with his sister, pursuing his studies at the school of William T. Adams (the well-known "Oliver Optic" and author of *Oliver Optic's Annual*), which was located on lower Broadway, South Boston. A lasting intimacy grew up between teacher and pupil, and years later, after Michael Gavin was established in his profession, he would take delight in driving to Dorchester and chatting again with Mr. Adams, for whom he always had the warmest liking and regard.

Digitized by Google

At this time he had also the opportunity of being tutored in special subjects, especially in Latin, which helped him much in his later medical work. In his spare moments he worked in Mr. Morris's store and thereby obtained a knowledge of *materia medica*, which in after years was to prove extremely serviceable. A pleasant glimpse of him at this period is afforded us by a lady who remembers, as a child, going with other small companions to Mr. Morris's shop to purchase lollipops and other dainties dear to the heart of youth. It was young Gavin who always served them, and it is interesting to observe that even then he displayed the same traits of character which were later to endear him so deeply to his friends.

As soon as we entered [says the lady], he would put down his book and come forward quickly and smilingly to find out what it was that we desired. He was always pleasant, courteous and kind, and showed a regard for the children who patronized the shop, and an interest in pleasing them, which made us all adore him, since we felt, instinctively, that his liking for us was not in the least assumed but was perfectly genuine and sincere.

At this time two friends of Michael Gavin were with him in Mr. Morris's store, and, strangely enough, all three were destined to take up later the study of medicine, and to follow it successfully

Digitized by Google

throughout their lives. One of these friends was Dr. John G. Blake of Boston, and the other Dr. Francis C. Plunkett of Lowell.

It must have been about the year 1860 that Michael Gavin definitely decided to follow the practice of medicine, and he accordingly completed his schooling, studying further with a private tutor, and, while still attending to his duties at Mr. Morris's, read, in his leisure moments, as widely as possible upon medical subjects; and so, by 1861, he was ready to enter the Harvard Medical School. According to the regulations of the school, in those times, three years' study of medicine was necessary for a degree, but two years only had to be spent at the school. During the third year the candidate might attend some other institution, or might study under the supervision of some duly qualified physician, or in some hospital. Michael Gavin took the required two years' work in the School, and in addition took summer courses in 1861, 1862, and 1863. He attended clinics at the Massachusetts General Hospital and performed surgical dispensary work as well. His superior at this time commended his work in the dispensary as "faithful, zealous, prompt, and practical."

At this time the Faculty of the Medical School was made up as follows: Dr. D. Humphreys Storer was the Dean of the Faculty, and Professor

Digitized by Google

of Midwifery and Medical Jurisprudence; Dr. John B. S. Jackson was Professor of Pathological Anatomy; Dr. Henry I. Bowditch was Professor of Clinical Medicine; Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes was Professor of Anatomy and Physiology; Dr. George C. Shattuck and Dr. Calvin Ellis were Professors of Theory and Practice; Dr. John Bacon was Professor of Chemistry; Dr. Henry J. Bigelow was Professor of Surgery; Dr. Edward H. Clarke was Professor of Materia Medica; and Dr. Charles E. Brown-Séquard was Professor of the Physiology and Pathology of the Nervous System —an imposing list of learned scholars and distinguished practitioners.

Michael Gavin entered the Medical School in 1861, took all the required work, and received the degree of Doctor of Medicine in the spring of 1864. Although in the light of modern requirements it might appear that the student of those days proceeded along a simple path, the actual acquisition of a degree was by no means an easy task. A final oral examination in nine different subjects had to be passed successfully, and the names of the faculty in Michael Gavin's day, as just recounted, are of a quality sufficient to convince one that this test, with its interviews with each professor in turn, must have been an ordeal of no small magnitude.

The period during which Michael Gavin at-

Digitized by Google

tended the Medical School was a memorable one in the history of America, and recalls at once to mind the strife which was then raging between the North and the South. It is evident that while still a medical student young Gavin was eager to go to the front, for in July, 1862, he took the examination for acting assistant surgeon in the United States Navy. A friendship had developed between him and his Professor, Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, and the following letter is interesting, showing as it does the regard which Dr. Holmes felt for his pupil.

BOSTON, *July* 15, 1862.

Mr. M. F. Gavin attended Medical Lectures during the last season of the school of Harvard University. I formed his acquaintance and was very favorably impressed with his intelligence and agreeable manner. He was a most attentive student and bears every mark of being earnest in the pursuit of the knowledge which will make him useful.

As Mr. Gavin wishes to be considered as a candidate for the place as Acting Assistant Surgeon in the Navy, it gives me much pleasure to commend him to the kind and candid attention of the examiners.

Hoping that he will prove himself fitted for the place which I believe he will fill ably and honorably, I am,

Yours very truly,

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.

Undoubtedly his youth counted against young Gavin, for he did not receive his appointment that

Digitized by Google

year, but in the following year, Dr. Holmes again recommended him as follows:

21 CHARLES ST., *Sept.* 8, 1863.

MY DEAR SIR: —

I have much pleasure in recommending to your notice Mr. M. F. Gavin the bearer of this note. He wishes to be examined for a place as Acting Assistant Surgeon in the Navy.

I have seen a great deal of Mr. Gavin and found him a very amiable and intelligent young man, whom it would give me real pleasure to assist in his professional career, feeling confident that he means to try hard for success, and not doubting, that if placed in a position to show his zeal and capacity, he will do himself and his instructors credit.

I am, my dear sir,

Yours very truly,

O. W. HOLMES.

This time he received his appointment, but there was another delay and when he finally had orders to report for duty at Cairo, Illinois, with Rear Admiral Porter's Mississippi squadron, his plans had been completely changed, and with prospects of a useful medical career before him, it seemed best to the Doctor and his friends to abandon the idea of entering the Navy at this time; and so, on October 17, 1863, his appointment was revoked. It is interesting, however, to read what he writes in a letter to a friend: "The poet Holmes has been one of my best friends. How pleased he was to

Digitized by Google

DR. GAVIN AS ACTING ASSISTANT SURGEON, U.S.N. 1863

Digitized by Google

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
R L

Digitized by Google

see me, after getting a commission in the United States Navy for which he had recommended me. Of course I called to see him dressed in my military suit with gold lace. . . ." This intimacy between professor and pupil was destined to continue for many years, and is evidenced by several other interesting letters from Dr. Holmes, written to Mr. Gavin years afterwards, when the younger man was practising for himself.

Although his plans to enter the Navy were not carried out, the war was destined to influence Michael Gavin's future in another way, and even before his graduation from the Medical School gave him the opportunity of becoming connected with the Boston City Hospital and of serving there as house officer, not only during the first year of its existence, but even from the day when its doors were thrown open to the public. The events leading up to the establishment of the hospital and to Dr. Gavin's appointment were briefly as follows. As early as 1849, there had been some discussion as to the advisability of building a hospital for the worthy poor of Boston. Nothing definite, however, was accomplished and the project slumbered for some years, only to be revived in 1856, and finally to come into actual being in 1861. Ground was broken for the hospital on September 9 of that year, and the first board of trustees was appointed

Digitized by Google

in 1863. Numerous changes have been made since then, with regard both to the number of trustees and to the manner of their appointment; but according to the provisions of the original statute, the Board was to consist of eight members, two from the Board of Aldermen, three from the Common Council, and three citizens at large, to be elected by the Council. In accordance, therefore, with the statute, the first Board of Trustees consisted of Thomas C. Amory, Jr., and the Honorable Otis Norcross from the Board of Aldermen, and Joseph Buckley, Lucius A. Cutler, and David H. Coolidge, from the Common Council, while Sumner Crosby, Dr. William R. Lawrence, and Andrew Carney, founder of the Carney Hospital, were chosen as members at large. Mr. Carney, however, being unable to serve, Theodore Metcalf was chosen in his place, and the Trustees proceeded to organize by electing Mr. Coolidge as Secretary and Mr. Amory as President.

By the following year, when Dr. Gavin was first to become connected with the hospital, various changes had taken place in the make-up of the Board. George W. Warren, from the Board of Aldermen, had taken the place of Mr. Amory; John Tisdale Bradlee, from the Council, had succeeded Mr. Cutler, who had been chosen Superintendent of the hospital; and the Honorable Otis Norcross

Digitized by Google

had been elected President of the Board, and in that capacity received the keys of the hospital at its dedication on May 24, 1864.

Meanwhile, the visiting physicians and surgeons of the hospital had been appointed, and on February 24, 1864, they convened at the residence of Dr. John Homans, the Senior Physician, at No. 11 Arlington Street. The visiting physicians were Dr. John Homans, Dr. W. W. Morland, Dr. F. E. Oliver, Dr. J. B. Upham, Dr. John N. Borland, and Dr. J. G. Blake; the visiting surgeons were Dr. C. H. Stedman, Dr. C. E. Buckingham, Dr. D. McB. Thaxter, Dr. C. D. Homans, Dr. A. Coolidge, Dr. D. W. Cheever; and the ophthalmic surgeon was Dr. H. W. Williams.

Having organized by electing Dr. John Homans as Chairman and Dr. Borland as Secretary, a special meeting was held on March 10, 1864, at the rooms of the Massachusetts Medical Society, to examine candidates for the position of house officers. These candidates were supposed to be graduates in medicine, but the demand for physicians and surgeons at the front had been so great that most of the graduates had entered the service either of the Army or the Navy, and as a result no candidates presented themselves. Accordingly, the Board of Physicians and Surgeons requested the Trustees to allow students in the third year of their course

Digitized by Google

at the Harvard Medical School to present themselves as candidates; and this request being complied with, an oral examination was held on April 1, 1864, and as a result of it, Mr. Gavin and Mr. D. F. Lincoln were appointed as house surgeons, Mr. John Dole and Mr. C. J. Blake as house physicians, and Mr. E. G. Loring as ophthalmic externe.

Thus, although not twenty years of age, Dr. Gavin had passed successfully his first important test, and stood ready to enter in earnest upon those professional duties which he was to pursue so arduously for so long a period of years.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER III

FURTHER PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION

THE dedication of the Boston City Hospital occurred on May 24, 1864. The exercises began with a selection by the choir; then followed the delivery of the keys by Alderman Davies, Chairman of the Committee on Public Buildings, to Mayor Lincoln, who, in turn, handed them to Otis Norcross, President of the Board of Trustees. After a response from Mr. Norcross, the Rev. William S. Studley led the meeting in prayer, and Thomas C. Amory, Jr., former President of the Board of Trustees, delivered an address. Then followed the hymn and the benediction, which brought the exercises to a close.

Of Dr. Gavin's activities, during these early days of the hospital, we may form some idea from two extracts. The first of these is historically of great interest.

On the surgical side Drs. Cheever and Stedman made the first visits on June 1, 1864. On the first Friday in June, being the first public operating day, Dr. Cheever did the first surgical operation in the amphitheatre in the central dome at 11 A.M. It was an adult male, with cancer of the commissure of the

Digitized by Google

lips and cheek; excision and repair constituted the operation. Dr. Gavin assisted as house surgeon, and Dr. C. J. Blake made a water-color drawing of the diseased parts.[1]

The second extract gives a faithful and spirited picture of the daily routine of Dr. Gavin's life in the Hospital.

The House Officer of those days had a much wider range of duties than his fellow of to-day. . . . He was required to look after the house patients, to attend to the out-patients half of the time, to attend to accidents and emergencies, to do what laboratory work there was to do, to keep the clinical records, to attend, make notes of, and occasionally make autopsies, to assist his colleagues in numerous ways, as in minor operations, dressing fractures. . . .

The hustling House Officer who was thoroughly interested in his work generally managed to see his very sickest patients before breakfast, and every few hours through the day. He was supposed to see all of his patients before his surgeon arrived, at ten or thereabouts. The visit with him lasted from one to three hours. After dinner, at one o'clock, he was usually kept busy all the afternoon carrying out the directions of his chief — dressing fractures, applying starch, glue or dextrine (glass) bandages (plaster of Paris was little used then), attending to accidents, or autopsies, etc., until it was time to make the evening visit, when all of the patients were again seen, diet and liquor lists made out, and so far as possible, everything made ready for the night.

[1] *A History of the Boston City Hospital*, published in 1906. Article by Dr. J. Bapst Blake.

Digitized by Google

The evenings were usually devoted to writing records, doing laboratory work, and the numerous other things for which no time could be found during the day. Those were busy, happy days, full of the keenest interest and the most valuable experience that a student could possibly have. It was no uncommon thing for a house officer to become so engrossed in his work that he would not go outside the Hospital for weeks, — a custom, by the way, that is not to be commended. And how tired we used to get![1]

This, then, was the kind of work which Dr. Gavin was called upon to do and which he did faithfully and well. Of his abilities when a student at the Medical School, we may form an estimate from the words of his classmate and fellow house officer, Dr. Clarence J. Blake.

Dr. Gavin [says Dr. Blake] was a good student. He was careful in his attendance, studious, and with a natural taste for surgery, made excellent dissections. He had a straightforward, kindly way of dealing with everyone, and was possessed of a buoyant disposition and a sense of dry humor which served to lighten his labors.

Equally pleasant is the picture of Dr. Gavin as House Officer in the Hospital by Dr. David F. Lincoln, who had been appointed with him to the surgical side of the service, and who roomed with him at the Hospital, and so during a year's inti-

[1] *A History of the Boston City Hospital*, published in 1906. Article by Dr. George W. Gay.

Digitized by Google

macy, had an excellent opportunity of becoming well acquainted with his fellow functionary.

Dr. Gavin [says Dr. Lincoln] impressed me, during the time I knew him, in a number of ways. First of all (and I do not consider that the word is out of place in speaking of the character of a man) he was remarkable for the real sweetness of his disposition. To his superiors, to his associates, and to his patients he was all that was gentle and affectionate and kind, and yet I cannot make it too clear that this gentleness and sweetness did not mean weakness, for when the occasion called for it, Dr. Gavin could, and did, speak his mind with such clearness and such genuine vigor, that his views upon the subject could not by any possibility be misunderstood.

Next, after his kindness to friends, I should speak of his sincerity. Simplicity was his great characteristic, — not of course in the sense in which the word is sometimes used, as implying a lack of intelligence, for Dr. Gavin was nothing if not intelligent; but simplicity in the sense of clear-cut, straight-forward directness of character; he possessed not the faintest trace of hypocrisy or double-dealing, but was always a sincere, clean-minded, brave-hearted gentleman.

Again, I should speak of a side of his character of which friends of later life may not have seen as much as I did. At this period of Dr. Gavin's life, he had, outside of his duties at the Hospital, no great responsibilities. He was a young man, interested in his work, interested in his friends, interested in everything about him. The future was unclouded; much knowledge that was to come to him later, in his busy career, of the sorrow and suffering of mankind, was as yet hidden from him, and in consequence, when his work was over for

Digitized by Google

the day, and he had a chance for relaxation, he positively effervesced with high spirits. Yet although his sense of humor was exceedingly keen, if jest happened to change to earnest, the lightheartedness of the boy would drop from him in an instant, and one could perceive behind it the seriousness, the high purpose, and the dignity which were to be so characteristic of him in his later years.

Lastly, I should speak of his great devotion to his work. This manifested itself in various ways. He was the most faithful of house officers; he never shirked, nor even thought of shirking. He was faithful, also, to his patients, and showed them every attention which was possible for him to bestow. And he admired and was intensely loyal to his superior officers — the visiting surgeons who came to us, each in turn, to do their part in lightening the world's burden of suffering and pain.

Thus speaks Dr. Lincoln of his room-mate. Another tribute to Dr. Gavin at this period is from Dr. David W. Cheever, whose long career is so well-known and under whom Dr. Gavin did his work.

When the Boston City Hospital was opened in June, 1864, it was voted by the staff, with the concurrence of the Trustees, that all candidates for the position of house officer should be subjected to a competitive examination. Dr. Gavin successfully passed this examination and was appointed as house surgeon for the term of one year. As my assistant, while I was on duty as visiting surgeon, Dr. Gavin was uniformly obliging, conscientious, and in every way satisfactory. He had, in his nature, an unusually large amount of

Digitized by Google

humaneness, and consequently took the greatest interest in his patients, and looked out for their welfare to the utmost extent of his ability.

On April 1, 1865, Dr. Gavin's term of service as house officer at the Hospital came to an end. On the fourth of May, he took and passed the state examination qualifying him to practice. On May 5 he received a commission in the Army from Governor Andrew, with a three years' appointment as Assistant Surgeon of the 57th Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteers, and on May 6 received orders to report at once for field-hospital duty with the First Division of the Ninth Army Corps in Virginia. Dr. Gavin immediately joined his division, and although seeing no actual fighting, his experience of military and camp life during the summer was extremely varied and interesting. The war was, however, by this time nearly over, peace was soon declared, and in August his regiment, together with many others, was mustered out.

Once again, therefore, the world lay before him, and as thoroughness was a characteristic quality of his, he determined that before beginning actual practice he would seek to gain a still wider knowledge of his profession. He also wished to revisit his old home in Ireland, and so decided to return to Roscommon and then pursue his studies on the

Digitized by Google

DR. GAVIN AS FIRST LIEUTENANT AND ASSISTANT SURGEON, U.S.V. 1865

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Continent and at the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin.

He accordingly embarked and reached Roscommon in September, 1865, and after a short visit there, went by way of Dublin and London to Paris, where he studied from October until January, doing work in the various hospitals of the city and having an opportunity to observe the cholera plague which was then raging there. On his return journey to Ireland he stopped again in London for some further work, and after another brief visit at his home, arrived in Dublin in March to take up his work for an advanced degree at the Royal College of Surgeons in that city.

Dr. Gavin was already acquainted with Professor E. W. Mapother of the Royal College, and from his Harvard professors he had brought letters of introduction to Dr. Fleetwood Churchill and Dr. W. T. Stoker, of the same institution. It did not take long for his usual characteristics to assert themselves, and for his instructors in Dublin to become enthusiastically interested in their young student from America. Firm and lasting friendships developed between Dr. Gavin and these men, which both sides prized highly, and which led, after the ocean had separated them, to an interesting and instructive correspondence which was carried on for many years.

Digitized by Google

Dr. Gavin now took up his plans to "surprise my Roscommon friends," as he wrote home, and accordingly for the next four months he studied at the Royal College of Surgeons. During this period he worked under tremendous pressure, often beginning his day's work as early as half-past five in the morning and studying up to midnight. The examinations themselves were very severe, lasting four or five days, but Dr. Gavin emerged from the ordeal with high honors, and received his advanced surgical degree on the twenty-first of August, 1866, and a supplementary medical degree on the fifteenth day of November, of the same year, becoming a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons.

His success was hailed with delight, not only by his friends in Roscommon, who wrote to him upon hearing the news, "You are a hero here now," but also by his friends in America. "Dr. Holmes," writes Dr. John G. Blake, "is tickled at one of his boys distinguishing himself so much. It is a great honor to pass so high." And another classmate writes: "The Harvard Faculty are much pleased at your taking a place at the Royal College. You know they feel a personal pride in any graduate who rises above the dead level, for in his elevation the college from which he is graduated is honored. There is hardly anything Storer, Shat-

Digitized by Google

tuck, or Holmes, and the others would not do for you now."

In September, 1866, after his examinations were over, Dr. Gavin returned to Roscommon and remained there through the fall of that year, working at the County Dispensary with Dr. Reynolds Peyton, a distinguished surgeon of that time. Dr. Gavin had made use of his two previous visits to Roscommon, short as they were, to form the acquaintance of Dr. Peyton and had already done some work under him; but on this third visit he was associated with him for three months, and in later life referred often to this experience as having proved of the very greatest benefit to him in his surgical work.

In January, 1867, he returned to Boston, and after a few months of private practice at No. 199 Harrison Avenue, moved to South Boston and opened his office at 11 Broadway, where his professional career was successfully started and established. It is thus apparent that, when Dr. Gavin finally considered himself ready to begin private practice, he had acquired with characteristic thoroughness a fund of broad experience, which in the words of a colleague of those days "was remarkable for his time."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IV

EARLY PRIVATE PRACTICE

THE beginning of Dr. Gavin's medical career differed materially from that of the average physician. In most cases, a large practice, if it comes at all, is built up slowly and by degrees, but Dr. Gavin was unusually successful from the start; and although characteristically modest, and not a man who would stretch a point in his own favor, yet in 1868, only a year after his coming to South Boston, he writes abroad to a friend that he appears to be "firmly established," and only a little later than this, refers to himself as "well, happy, and very busy, with almost more patients than I can attend to."

In tracing the development of Dr. Gavin's career it is interesting to note how one of his most valuable and likable traits was actually considered at this particular period. There were many physicians in practice at that time, who, though men of skill and real kindness of heart, were distinctly of that "old school" made famous by Dr. Abernethy and others of like nature, who believed that patients should be dominated, and made to accept a po-

Digitized by Google

sition of inferiority toward their doctors. Thus, Dr. Gavin's quiet courtesy, and lack of blustering self-assertion, and his kindly interest in his patients' welfare, were at first often misunderstood. "He appears to be a very nice young man," one elderly gentleman remarked, after a visit from Dr. Gavin, "but I fear he does n't know enough. He does n't seem to shout and scold the way a doctor ought to." Presently, however, as people grew better acquainted with the Doctor, they came to realize that kindliness and courtesy are perfectly consistent with a high degree of professional skill; and when they had once learned this lessson, there was never afterwards the slightest question regarding his success.

Dr. Gavin was soon forced to arrange his work according to a schedule, in order to accomplish what he had to do. He invariably rose early, on Sundays attending six o'clock service, at which, as he writes a friend, "I read the Gospel—and preach to myself—instead of going to a late and fashionable Mass." On week-days he generally read until half-past seven, when he had breakfast, so that he might begin his round of visits by eight o'clock. This, of course, compared with the hours of most physicians, was an exceptionally early start, especially for a man who was often called out in the evening and who, indeed, not infrequently lost his

Digitized by Google

night's sleep altogether. But the Doctor clung tenaciously to his schedule, and when a colleague once asked him if he did not think such early hours a mistake, since a doctor, with night work to do, must necessarily conserve his energies, in order to be at his best throughout the day, his reply was interesting and thoroughly typical.

> If you have ever been ill [he answered], you must surely remember how much it meant to you to receive an early visit from the doctor. Only those who have been through the experience realize with what eager anticipation an invalid looks forward to the arrival of his physician.

This answer, indeed, makes clear to us Dr. Gavin's whole attitude toward his patients. It was *their* comfort, *their* welfare, *their* convenience, which was to be considered above all. This was the keynote of all his professional work.

The day's work, thus early begun, was busily continued. Two years after commencing his private practice he was obliged to purchase his first horse and buggy to cover his rounds. From that time, as long as he continued in practice, he always had a good horse for his work. His knowledge and judgment of horses were well known to his friends, and while, as a good driver, he was thoughtful of his horse when necessary, he nevertheless required one which could hold to the standard he set. He

Digitized by Google

writes, of one which did not survive this test: "I will sell him in the spring, and buy a horse of more spirit, as I like one that travels freely, and without urging." A fast horse soon became a positive necessity to the Doctor, an indispensable cog in the machinery of his day's work; and often in later years, when he did not as a rule drive himself, if it appeared that the minutes were slipping by and he might be late at an appointment, he would take the reins and the schedule would be maintained. He always had a personal pride in the appearance of his horse, the buggy and harness, and everything that was used in connection with his driving.

When the Doctor was not on service at one of the hospitals with which he was connected, his morning calls would usually last until half-past twelve, when he would return to his office for a light lunch. The number of his daily calls fast increased, but his manner and method, so typically characteristic of him, made it possible for him to look after them. His visits were always brief; sparing of speech, waiting for no idle gossip, when satisfied as to the condition of a particular sick person, the next one only was in his mind. But while at the bedside, the patient received the most careful observation, and the soundest advice, as well as a word of sympathy or understanding that "would be worth waiting all day to hear." Always cour-

Digitized by Google

teous, never appearing to be hurried or disturbed, Dr. Gavin maintained a schedule calling for so much work that few men could have continued to live up to it.

He was punctuality itself. His drivers could tell to a nicety just how far to let the horse walk down the street on a cold day before it was time to turn to meet the Doctor at the door; and they can remember too the look from those clear gray eyes if they had carelessly wandered too far and found him waiting at the curb on a busy day. The times of his consultations and other appointments were scrupulously kept. His schedule of calls was arranged in the morning with the accuracy and precision of a business man whose every minute counts. His ability to figure ahead how long he would be at certain places, and the time of making distances in between, was little short of marvelous; and no matter how crowded a morning might appear, and how many calls were to be made before the keeping of a certain important appointment, it nevertheless always happened that the plans were adhered to, and the place of the appointment reached just on time, or a few minutes ahead.

In his work at the hospital, where promptness means so much, not only to the patients themselves, but to the internes, the nurses, and in fact to the entire machinery of the institution, Dr. Gavin was

Digitized by Google

always "on time"; and although the custom of those early days became a habit later on, and his rounds were always made as expeditiously as possible, yet they were made with scrupulous care, and no patient was ever slighted or neglected. All were shown the greatest consideration and were given the highest degree of medical skill and advice. His private patients as well, knew this quality and many have testified, "When Dr. Gavin said he would come at a certain hour, he never failed to appear."

The number of his daily calls, as related by his early drivers, when he accepted all the work that came to him, appears astonishing, but examination of his books, at these periods, has shown successions of days when thirty or more calls were made, and some days in which the number was over forty.

Promptly at one his office-hour began, and although he attended to his patients with the utmost celerity which their cases allowed, his waiting-room was generally so crowded that his duties there were scarcely attended to by three o'clock, when the office-hour was supposed to end. He would then start upon his rounds again, and usually spent the time from three to five in making further calls, while at five or five-thirty it was his invariable custom, for a period of almost nine years, to dine at the Parker House. His keen observation

Digitized by Google

and interest in all things about him was here put to good use, and he thus describes the hotel in a letter to a friend.

New York, as a city, has many advantages over Boston; none will gainsay it. Yet there is one thing she has not got, namely, a rendezvous for the great people of our time. The word great, is probably in this case wrong, the word notable being the better word. We have such a place in Boston. The mixture one sees there is curious. Judges forgetting for the nonce the serious part they play in the fulfillment of our social laws, are to be seen saying "soft words" to the French flower-girl; Henry Ward Beecher brushes past Anna Dickinson (most extravagant of women in the matter of dress), who stands in the doorway talking with an actor of the Boston stage; next, a well-known poet comes in, arm in arm with a well-known writer for the press. Parsons, best of speakers, dressed like a fop "from top to toe," is talking across his table to a lady who writes fashion reports for more than one of the Boston newspapers. Ridpath, of anti-slavery fame, is in company with one of the leaders of the "woman question." Miss Kellogg of opera fame, sits at a small table *vis-à-vis* her mother, who, from all accounts takes the best of care of her child, seeing that she does not take cold after singing; and so I might go on telling of what one sees every day at "Parker's," for this is the place I write about.

After dinner, the Doctor returned to his office on foot, walking usually along Washington Street and taking the greatest delight in his stroll. Quoting again from one of his letters:—

Digitized by Google

Generally after dinner I walk down our principal street, looking at store windows as I go by. You will say what a way to idle one's time. But it is not wasting one's time; after all we learn something, see a book that interests us, or it may be some labor- or time-saving machine, a new style of furniture, or above all, those shops where prints, pictures, and articles of vertu are sold.

The Doctor's evening office-hour lasted from seven until nine, after which, if there were no calls to be attended to, he enjoyed the rest of his evening in reading, or at the piano, or in the company of his friends.

When one considers that in addition to this routine, Dr. Gavin, with his large practice, necessarily had many cases which broke in upon his night's rest, it seems remarkable that he could do the work he did. Yet he had in the first place a splendid constitution, and although never what could be called an especially strong or robust man, his regular habits and temperate tastes, together with a disposition, a temperament, so even, so unruffled or disturbed in the face of stress, or rush, or excitement of any kind, made it possible for him to perform, with apparently little fatigue, an amount of labor that might well have exhausted other men, of a more excitable temperament, or a less abstemious life.

There are many pleasant memories connected

Digitized by Google

with this first epoch of Dr. Gavin's professional career; memories never to be effaced, of such dear friends as Bishop Healy and his brothers, Father Patrick and Father Sherwood Healy; Father Blenkinsop, the "Father William" whose church stood within a few doors of Dr. Gavin's office, and in whose house many pleasant evenings were spent; Monsignor O'Callaghan; "Dan" Barry; John Boyle O'Reilly, and the early days of the Papyrus Club.

There are memories, too, of many musical evenings passed in the little room behind the Doctor's office, with Mr. Grant, and John Farley and Tom Karl, whose music was a true delight to their hearers. And there were the yearly visits of the opera to Boston, to which Dr. Gavin looked forward with the greatest eagerness, for his love for music was almost a passion with him and was equalled only by his love of flowers and nature. He gave to his little garden all the time that he could spare, and displayed unbounded enthusiasm in its success. It was in these days also that Dr. Gavin indulged his fondness for horseback riding, and many are the references in his letters to those splendid rides in the suburbs of Boston, and the ever-present beauties of nature. Whenever it was possible, at this time, he would make his visits on horseback, but sometimes he would have to take

Digitized by Google

the little colored boy, "the smoked Irishman," who would ride with him when he drove on his rounds and who "would sit all day without saying a word." Thus, one after another the years rolled by, until in 1876 — at the end of almost a decade — Dr. Gavin found himself in possession of a large practice and was looked upon as one of the successful younger physicians of the day.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER V

LATER PRIVATE PRACTICE

So the Doctor's practice grew and flourished, and when, in the spring of 1876, he transferred his office to a new home at No. 99 Broadway his friends doubtless supposed that the change was merely to meet the demands of his work, which was constantly increasing. Yet the acquisition of the new home was in reality inspired by a motive altogether different; for in the fall of that year occurred the happiest event in the Doctor's life, — his marriage to Miss Ellen Theresa Doherty of New York.

This union proved to be an ideal one, and was blessed by the coming of a son, Basil Gavin, and of a daughter, Hilda Theresa Gavin. Of the Doctor's home life, and of the mutual devotion of the entire family, all who knew him speak with the sincerest admiration. As Miss Conway expresses it, "His pleasure was in the society of his family. Nothing could exceed his affectionate devotion to them. When his children were small, a disapproving glance from him was a sufficient reproof for a fault, while his commendation was their happiest recompense."

Digitized by Google

Dr. Gavin was always busy. His days contained no idle moments, and in his years there were no wasted days. Yet even in a career so uniformly arduous, the decade from 1876 to 1886 stands prominently forth as a period during which the pressure of professional duties, of many different sorts, taxed his strength and endurance to the utmost.

In the first place, his private practice by this time was very large. His reputation as a kind and skillful practitioner was already great, and when a patient had once called upon him for aid there was never afterward any question of "changing doctors." As a result there are many persons in South Boston to-day whom Dr. Gavin attended regularly for twenty, thirty, forty, and in some instances for almost fifty years.

Various reasons combined to create this continued demand for Dr. Gavin's services. He possessed great natural gifts as a diagnostician, and through his wide experience as a general practitioner, this faculty became so sharpened and developed that he was able to determine, with remarkable accuracy, just what was wrong with a patient's health. In similar fashion, in cases of serious illness, he was justly celebrated for his ability to predict correctly regarding the invalid's chances of recovery. A distinguished colleague of the Doctor has

Digitized by Google

thus expressed himself: "There is a narrow boundary line which separates the kingdom of life from the kingdom of death, and Dr. Gavin was always an adept in knowing on which side of that line his patient stood."

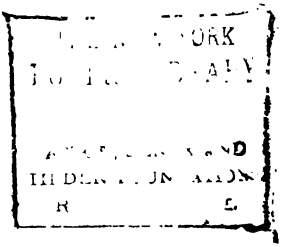
Many instances could be cited to attest to this great gift. In one case, which occurred only a few years before Dr. Gavin's death, a fellow practitioner had almost abandoned hope of a patient's recovery, and had practically decided upon a critical operation, when the family asked that he summon Dr. Gavin in consultation. The Doctor, although in poor health himself, examined the invalid, and then with characteristic mildness dissented from the opinion of the other surgeon. "I hardly think," he observed, "that we should operate. In fact, I shall be considerably surprised if by to-night the patient is not feeling appreciably better. I will call again this evening." After Dr. Gavin's departure, however, the younger man expressed doubts as to the correctness of his colleague's advice, suggesting that the condition of his health at that time might in some degree impair his judgment, and strongly urging an operation, as being immediately necessary that day, if the life of the patient was to be considered.

But the family had called on Dr. Gavin in their troubles for many years, his advice had always been

Digitized by Google

DR. GAVIN AT THE TIME OF HIS MARRIAGE IN 1876

Digitized by Google


Digitized by Google

scrupulously followed, and there had been no regrets; and so, after most serious consideration by the whole family, the attending surgeon was informed that it had been decided unanimously that Dr. Gavin's advice should be followed, even in his old age and ill health, and that no operation was to be performed. And when Dr. Gavin made his second visit that evening, the patient gave his own proof of the correctness of the diagnosis, and perhaps surprised even Dr. Gavin himself, by opening the door to welcome him. And the recovery was as permanent as it was speedy.

Consultation took a prominent place in Dr. Gavin's professional work, especially in his later years. The demand for his services in this particular branch of work, can be accounted for, first, by his established fame as a diagnostician, and then, by the courtesy and thoughtfulness which he invariably displayed toward fellow practitioners who came to him for an opinion in doubtful cases.

But the Doctor's attainments were not limited to an ability to interpret correctly the symptoms of his patients. He was able to locate their ailments, but he was able, also, to cure them. In surgical cases his cool head and steady hand accomplished wonders; while as a physician the treatments which he prescribed seldom failed in accomplishing their aim. His prescriptions proved especially effective

Digitized by Google

in producing beneficial results, so that the fame of many of them spread far, and orders for them were not infrequently received from distant points, or from patients who had left the city, and felt that they had not found so good a prescription elsewhere. Even as these chapters are written a request has come to the drug store to which Dr. Gavin was wont to recommend his patients, for the renewal of one of his prescriptions which was first written twenty-five years before. His prescriptions were always varied and modern, at the time they were written, — in fact, they were in advance of the times, for his foreign studies, and his constant correspondence with friends abroad, as well as his subscription to foreign medical journals at a time when they were rarer in this country than at present, kept him not only abreast but ahead of his profession, and his druggist has said that invariably the first order that he would receive for some new and efficacious compound would be from Dr. Gavin.

Dr. Gavin was thoroughly conscientious, and to a difficult problem would give unsparingly of the best that was in him, spending anxious days and sleepless nights in his efforts to effect a cure. More than once he has remarked while driving to the hospital in the morning, "I hardly slept an hour last night, Patrick, thinking over an operation I have to do to-day." Or again, if some unusual

Digitized by Google

complication arose in a case, he would spare no pains to discover anything that he might learn regarding it. "I have looked up everything I could find about such complaints," he writes to a professional friend. The story, indeed, is told in South Boston to this day of one of his early cases, where, even against his better judgment, he fought a valiant battle to save a patient's life. A young man working in a provision store had given his knee a severe gash with a meat-axe. Dr. Gavin was called, and dressed the wound, but at the end of a week the progress of the injury was far from satisfactory and it appeared to Dr. Gavin that amputation would be necessary. To verify his fears, he called in consultation three eminent surgeons of Boston, and they unhesitatingly agreed with him that if the patient's life were to be saved, immediate amputation was the proper course to pursue. But now arose an obstacle. This was in the early days of surgery; the family of the young man regarded the idea of amputation with horror; and after a solemn conference they announced to Dr. Gavin their decision. He was to do his utmost by medical treatment to save the young man's life, and since the family were acting directly contrary to his advice, no blame in any event was to be attached to Dr. Gavin. If the young man lived, so much the better; but if he was to die, he was to die with his leg on.

Digitized by Google

This was their ultimatum; no persuasion, no reasoning would change them, and accordingly the Doctor took up the struggle to save both life and limb. He spent numberless hours at the young man's bedside; on at least one occasion he was there from nightfall until dawn; and finally, after almost a month of unremitting effort, during which he had brought into play all the resources of his skill, the turning-point was reached, and recovery began, to result finally, in the full realization of the family's hopes.

Such, then, was Dr. Gavin's ability in the many sides of his profession. Yet, great as it was, it only partially accounted for his extraordinary popularity. For, beyond his gifts as a surgeon and physician, he possessed those sterling qualities, so peculiarly his own; a real kindness, a true sympathy, and his own spirit of regarding his patients not as so many medical or surgical "cases" but as his personal and particular care, whose welfare was almost his own.

It is impossible for any one who did not know Dr. Gavin to understand the position he occupied among those whom he attended. They regarded him with a love and honor, and almost a veneration, that is given to but few men. His word was law; but this status he won, not through any harsh methods, but through his genuine, sincere interest

Digitized by Google

in the welfare of those whom he undertook to help.

There is a story of a certain clergyman who once said that he owed his very great influence among his parishioners to the fact that he never said, "*You* must do this," or "*You* must do that," but always, "*We* must do this or that." This in effect, was the method Dr. Gavin used in dealing with his patients; and while this desire to work in harmony, this instinct for coöperation, and coördination, for making allies and not enemies of his fellow men, was so characteristic of him that it is noticeable in every department of his life, yet nowhere is it displayed to better advantage than in this intercourse with those whose sufferings he was called upon to allay.

In my family [says a patient who knew the Doctor for fifty years] he was regarded by all of us, children and grown-ups alike, almost as a father. When he entered the house, in time of sickness, we placed ourselves unreservedly in his hands. Whatever he told us to do, that we did, in the full confidence that he would not be mistaken; and he never was. At least one of my children owes his life, to-day, to a long and desperate vigil when Dr. Gavin fought all night to rescue him from the clutches of membranous croup; and at last, in the gray light of the morning, he was able to turn to us, haggard and weary, but triumphant, to tell us that the child was out of danger, and that his life was saved.

Digitized by Google

Among many scenes of sorrow and suffering, in those busy days, humorous occurrences were not lacking. On one occasion, in the midst of a busy office-hour, a distracted mother appeared, imploring the Doctor to come at once to her home, as her only boy was "awful sick." Dr. Gavin asked her a question or two, pacified her, and told her that he would come as soon as his office-hour was ended. Arriving at the house, he found the invalid, and after a brief examination turned to depart, assuring the mother that the boy would get well. "But, Doctor, you're leaving without giving any prescription!" the good woman cried. Dr. Gavin paused; then answered, with a twinkle in his eye, —

Sure enough, I was going to forget the prescription, but I'll give it to you now, since you ask for it. Here it is: One stout strap, to be applied vigorously, *in the usual place*. That, I think, should effect a much needed cure, for your boy has only been smoking his first pipe.

On another occasion, a patient entered Dr Gavin's office displaying a curious swelling on his wrist. The Doctor examined the injury a moment and then said, "Sit down, and rest your wrist on my desk, while I see what we can find about the subject." The patient obeyed, and the Doctor reached for a massive volume from his shelf above, the size of which alone comforted the

Digitized by Google

patient at once, for it seemed to him that in a book of such proportions, the Doctor could surely find a remedy for the swollen wrist. But the remedy was even nearer at hand than he supposed, for suddenly, and without warning, the Doctor brought down the volume on the wrist, and after one involuntary cry, the patient stared, astounded to find that the swelling had disappeared, never to return. There was one patient at least who took his leave imbued with great respect for a doctor who could cure, not only by the inside of the book, but by the outside as well.

Story after story might be repeated to show the love and veneration with which Dr. Gavin was regarded, but one of the prettiest of these concerns a little boy of six, who had been ill, but who had improved so rapidly under the Doctor's care that he had come to share the admiration which his whole family felt toward him. During his period of convalescence, this small boy was one day playing about the house, snapping the whip over a team of imaginary horses with such vigor that his mother felt called upon to caution him. "You must be careful, dear," she said. "If you should put out one of your eyes, nobody could ever give you another." At which the boy stopped playing for a moment and then rejoined, with conviction, "Oh yes, mother; Dr. Gavin could."

Digitized by Google

Thus it is apparent that the Doctor had a practice in South Boston alone quite large enough to satisfy a less active and energetic man. Yet this practice comprised by no means the whole of his activities. His reputation had spread, and he was called, not only through other parts of Boston and its suburbs, but also to near-by towns and occasionally to more distant points throughout the New England States. He had, moreover, made many friends among the younger doctors with whom he had come in contact in his work at the hospitals, and many of these young men, starting in practice for themselves, were glad, in difficult cases, to call upon an older colleague whose friendship they valued, and for whose professional skill they had the highest regard. As one of them, looking back on this period of his life has expressed it, —

> I could when beginning practice, set an arm or a leg in theory, or upon an examination paper, as neatly as the best surgeon in the world; but when the actual arm or leg lay bodily before me I was only too glad to summon Dr. Gavin, so that his practical knowledge might supplement my theories as to how the work might best be done.

From those who were devoting their lives to the service of religion, Dr. Gavin would never accept any remuneration for his attendance. Thus various communities of the convents of Notre Dame

Digitized by Google

in Roxbury, and later in South Boston, and those of the Sacred Heart, hold Dr. Gavin in their memories with a regard and an esteem beyond the power of the written word. On one occasion, where a Sister of Notre Dame knew that an illness in the convent must have been an expensive one, she tried to prevail upon the Doctor to accept some compensation for all that he had done. His reply was:—

You and yours are spending your lives in the service of the poor, the sick, the needy, and the afflicted. If any small skill of mine can ever aid you, it is yours, at any hour of the day or night. Never speak of my "kindness" in seeking to help you; my "privilege" is the proper phrase.

In similar fashion, a member of the Convent of the Sacred Heart says of Dr. Gavin:—

He was noted for his universal charity, which extended to all classes and creeds, and which for many years was bestowed upon a great number of religious institutions and charitable homes. His administrations were accompanied by a gracious delicacy in sending medicines, and all that could nourish his patients and restore them to health. Lovingly do we recall the attentions paid to our own religious order, and remember how, on one occasion, when the Doctor had made his last call for the day at eight o'clock in the evening, he later became anxious, and returned at eleven o'clock to ascertain the patient's condition. Throughout all New England, the suffering poor give testimony of

Digitized by Google

his charity, and of his noble devotion to the welfare of mankind.

Thus were laid the foundations of the respect and love which Dr. Gavin everywhere commanded. His professional skill was firmly established, regarded as highly by his fellow practitioners as by his patients and friends, but the esteem in which he was held was not only due to his skill, but was also the result of his own individual personality.

The term personal magnetism is often misapplied as a quality, but it must have been a very distinct, strong personal magnetism, that inspired people to feel the confidence which they placed in Dr. Gavin, and to give him the love that they did. Few physicians, and fewer men in other walks of life, gained such love and confidence. His hold on people was strong and lasting, because it was an absolutely natural hold, unaffected, without a thought of design, and based on sincerity. People who knew Dr. Gavin came to him with hope and confidence as a physician and as a friend, because they knew that he had that sincerity, and because they were sure of his sympathy and understanding if their cause was just and right. With his clear perception he at once distinguished between true and false, and would not even listen, should the story be a lie; but if the trouble was real, people went to him, as a wise counselor and a kind friend,

Digitized by Google

and the mere fact of such a listener was an encouragement and an inspiration. Not that he had time to listen to many long narratives of misfortune, or that he would give undiscriminatingly of his means with a politic generosity, — for his charity was only on rare occasions of the easy check-book nature, — but rather that his broad experience and his magnetic understanding enabled him to comprehend and to sympathize, and to offer just the advice and comfort which were craved and sought for. He was a man to be turned to instinctively in time of trouble as a wise and just adviser.

Perhaps many who thus relied on him did not really understand the full breadth of Dr. Gavin's character, his aims and ideals, but they were conscious of the flowing kindness of his nature, and needing sympathy, they sought it out, and willingly allowed themselves to be carried along in its comforting influence. Is it strange that such a character turned naturally, instinctively, to the calling of medicine for its life work?

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VI

BOSTON CITY HOSPITAL

DR. GAVIN'S connection with the Boston City Hospital was an unusually varied one. As has been noted, he served as house officer in 1864 and 1865, and in 1867, after his return from abroad, he again became a member of the Hospital staff. This time his rise in rank was a rapid one. In February, 1867, one month after he had established himself in practice in Boston, he received the appointment of ophthalmic externe for one year; but in the April following, he was made Assistant Surgeon to Out-Patients, and in March 1868 was chosen Surgeon to Out-Patients, which position he held until 1872. The work of this department since the opening of the Hospital had greatly increased, as is evidenced by the appended quotation.[1]

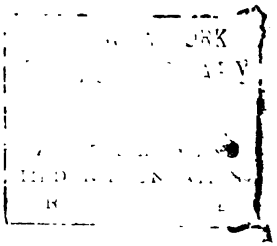
The writer cannot remember the time when more room was not desirable. At times it has been absolutely necessary to put beds in the venter of the wards and even into the corridors. Over-crowding was formerly thought to account for some of the unfavorable results of treatment. It certainly was not conducive to the desirable hygienic conditions.

[1] *Reminiscences of the Boston City Hospital:* Dr. George W. Gay.

Digitized by Google

HOUSE OFFICERS OF THE BOSTON CITY HOSPITAL IN 1865

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

The following extract from the Trustees' report dated April 30, 1871, is typical of the state of affairs at this time:—

"As the business of this branch of the Hospital is rapidly increasing, we would respectfully call your attention to our need of more room. We often have from forty to fifty patients daily, and our present quarters are much too limited for their occupation.

"M. F. GAVIN, M.D.
"GEO. W. GAY, M.D.
"Surgeons to Out-Patients."

From 1872 to 1879 Dr. Gavin was not connected with the City Hospital, but in the latter year he was appointed a member of the Board of Trustees, where he served until 1885, and, in the words of one of his contemporaries, "attended to his duties in the most faithful and conscientious manner imaginable, and rendered valuable aid to his fellow members of the Board through his ability to regard the problems put before him from the view-point of an honorable, intelligent, and broad-minded physician."

The following letter shows the esteem in which Dr. Gavin was held by his fellow members of the Board:—

CITY HOSPITAL, BOSTON, *Jan.* 12, 1885.

M. F. GAVIN, M.D.

MY DEAR SIR: — At the last meeting of the Trustees of the City Hospital, you were unanimously elected a Surgeon of Out-Patients.

Digitized by Google

Your resignation as a Trustee was announced and it was voted, "That the secretary express to Dr. Gavin the great regret which the Trustees personally feel in losing his very kindly and valuable assistance, and their high appreciation of the very faithful, assiduous, and efficient service which he has for many years, rendered the Hospital."

I need not, I am sure, further express to you the pleasure which I have experienced in our relations as Trustees, and my obligations for your many acts of courtesy and kindness.

Yours very truly,

HENRY H. SPRAGUE.

(Sec.)

In 1886, the year after his appointment, there came a change in Dr. Gavin's activities, and, while his professional responsibilities were still further increased, yet the burden of actual labor was to some extent lightened. Two things caused this change; an appointment and an illness. The appointment, a well-deserved tribute to the Doctor's skill, was that of Visiting Surgeon to the Boston City Hospital. This of course meant more work of an important and arduous nature, and if Dr. Gavin had remained in good health at this time, and taken up this additional burden to add to the amount he was already doing, it might have been that the strain would soon have proved too much for any one man to carry. As it happened, however, he experienced at this time the first severe illness of his life,

Digitized by Google

—an intimation, possibly, from Nature herself, to remind him that no man, however strong, is more than human, and that in his zeal for his work he had already been drawing too freely upon his reserves of energy and strength.

So, after he had passed through a serious sickness, upon his recovery he wisely decided to treat himself with more consideration by establishing a custom of taking a week's vacation every spring and fall, and by abandoning most of the work which had called him out at night. Thus he was able, in some degree, to lessen the strain under which he had been laboring. With this readjustment of his professional schedule he entered afresh upon another period of his career, which was destined to last for twenty busy years, during which he worked with unflagging vigor and undiminished skill.

A special interest attaches to the Doctor's appointment as Visiting Surgeon to the Boston City Hospital, for his connection with that institution is probably absolutely unique. Beginning with his year of service as House Surgeon in 1864, at the time of the opening of the Hospital, he was later, as has been noted, Surgeon to Out-Patients in 1867, 1868, 1869, 1870 and 1871; and after an interval was chosen a member of the Board of Trustees and served six years, from 1879 to 1884, inclusive. Yet all these years added together comprise but a por-

Digitized by Google

tion of the time during which he was connected with the Hospital, for in 1885 he was again Surgeon to Out-Patients; from 1886 to 1896 he was Visiting Surgeon; in 1897, when the distinction was first made between Senior and Junior Visiting Surgeons, he was rated as Junior Visiting Surgeon, and again held that position in 1898; while from 1899 to 1906 he was Senior Visiting Surgeon, and from 1907 until his death in 1915 he was a member of the board of Consulting Physicians and Surgeons. Altogether, a record of over fifty years of service, practically continuous, in an institution justly famed for the high character and ability of its personnel.

In addition to these permanent appointments, he also served the hospital in many other ways — as member, or chairman, of various committees from time to time; and for many years as one of the Examining Board.

Although Dr. Gavin's private practice gave him many opportunities for surgical work, it was, necessarily, at the hospitals that his skill as a surgeon was brought most into evidence. Here, there were larger opportunities than in private practice, and in every branch of surgery, with resources at hand for individual endeavor. Although surgery was always subordinate in Dr. Gavin's mind to the matter of getting the patient better, as will be seen

Digitized by Google

later, nevertheless as chief of his surgical staff in the Boston City Hospital, many operations were necessary almost daily, and here unquestionably was presented the best test of Dr. Gavin's surgical skill. Always cool, quiet, apparently unhurried, but still completing his work with the greatest possible celerity, and affecting no unnecessary effort, he performed his operations with a knowledge, a precision, and a thoroughness that made it a professional pleasure to watch him. He knew absolutely clearly in his own mind just exactly what was to be done, and his experience told him just how to do it; and should the unexpected happen, he never for a moment lost the calm poise of his manner, and did precisely the right thing that was necessary.

Many and great were the changes which the Doctor witnessed during his long period of connection with the Hospital. He saw the number of hospital buildings increase from four to forty-six; the number of hospital beds from 208 to 1061. He saw 800 patients treated in 1864, and saw that number increased in 1914 to 116,729. He saw the original medical and surgical staff of 21 members gradually expand until it numbered 103.

Nor was this all; for he was privileged to live through that great period in the medical world when discoveries of the most sweeping character

Digitized by Google

magnificently enlarged the boundaries of our knowledge, and completely revolutionized the treatment of disease. What some of these discoveries were, we may learn from the address delivered by the Honorable A. Shuman, President of the Board of Trustees, at the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Boston City Hospital, on June 20, 1914.

Let us glance [said President Shuman] at some of the achievements of the Hospital during this half century. Chief among them, it seems to me, has been the triumph over the dread scourge of pyæmia and sepsis. The present generation has little knowledge of the horrors and dangers that attended the surgery of those early days. Our hearts should be filled with gratitude to those who by their labors and researches have made possible the present happy conditions.

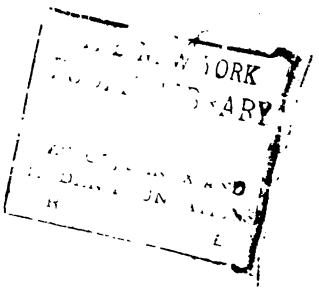
In later years the discovery of the X-ray and the use of radium have opened up unlimited possibilities for good. Wonderful results in the treatment of surface cancer, in the early diagnosis of pulmonary tuberculosis, the more exact knowledge of fractures and diseases of the bones, and in the location of foreign bodies, have been attained by these agencies. . . .

The great good accomplished by the South Department must not be overlooked. Opened in 1895, it was the first separate hospital in this country for the care and treatment of infectious diseases. A volume could be written and still not do justice to the noble work that has been done by this department in the saving of human life and the relief of suffering, as well as the prevention and control of epidemics of scarlet fever, diphtheria, and measles in our city and community. . . .

Digitized by Google

DR. GAVIN'S SURGICAL SERVICE AT THE BOSTON CITY HOSPITAL IN 1903

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

Fifty years ago, there was no ambulance station. Patients came to the hospital in hacks or carriages. The Hospital now has four auto-ambulances for the main Hospital and three horse-ambulances for the use of the relief stations.

The two relief stations are of great benefit to the citizens of Boston in the rendering of prompt and efficient aid in emergency cases; while the Convalescent Home is a boon for the women who are considered well enough to be discharged from the hospital, and yet who, through lack of proper home surroundings, need care and comfort in their convalescence.

Such were the changes of fifty years, and it seems most appropriate that Dr. Gavin should have been able to witness them, since his keenest professional delight was in watching the steady progress of medical knowledge, and the development of new appliances which were to aid his colleagues and himself in their steadfast fight against suffering, disease, and death.

Dr. Gavin's long connection with the City Hospital, and the effort and time which he gave so unsparingly and loyally to it, formed a large part of his life's work. His heart and soul were always with his work for the institution. He loved his work there; it meant more to him than he ever said, and his loyalty to it and enthusiasm for it continued throughout his life. On many occasions in later years, his friends and even his family made the suggestion that, chiefly to conserve his own

Digitized by Google

strength and energy, he should give up his work at the Hospital; but it can truthfully be said that he loved the connection so well, that at no time would he even consider so doing.

The success of the Boston City Hospital has been due, in a great measure, to the loyalty and enthusiasm of its staff and associates. And it is doubtful if it has ever had any man on its staff who gave for its good purposes more loyally and more enthusiastically of his best energy and skill, and who was more happy in doing so, than Dr. Gavin.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VII

OTHER PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS. WRITINGS

ALTHOUGH Dr. Gavin carried upon his shoulders a heavy burden of professional cares in his own large practice, and with his work for the Boston City Hospital, he nevertheless found time for still other professional activities. Chief among these, perhaps, was his connection with the Carney Hospital.

Dr. Gavin accepted an appointment as surgeon to the Carney Hospital in 1880, and served for twenty-three years, until 1903, when the system of continuous service went into effect; in that year he became a member of the Board of Consultation, and retained that position until the time of his death, twelve years later. As thirty-five years is a long time to remain connected with one institution, and as his work at the Carney played such a large part in Dr. Gavin's life, it may be of interest to give, briefly, the history of the institution.

The Carney Hospital was founded by Andrew Carney, who, as a young man, came from Ireland to America and was successful in business. Mr. Carney was a man of kindly and charitable nature,

Digitized by Google

and perceiving the need of a hospital in South Boston, he purchased in 1863 the Howe residence, situated on Old Harbor Street on Dorchester Heights, and gave the property, together with its surrounding lawns and orchards, to the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul. The building, under the supervision of Sister Ann Alexis, was made ready for occupancy, and the first patient was received on the ninth of June, 1863. Physicians of eminence were glad to help in this new work, and upon the rolls of the Hospital are to be found the names of many doctors and surgeons widely celebrated for their professional skill.

In 1865, the Hospital was incorporated under the laws of Massachusetts, and its property was placed in the hands of a corporation composed of Sisters of Charity stationed at the Hospital. This body, which is known as the Carney Hospital Corporation, directs the work of the Hospital, and controls its business affairs.

At this time, also, plans were drawn for the present building, and one wing and a part of the chapel were erected in 1868. The general public, however, probably does not appreciate the financial odds against which the Hospital has struggled, for it is not endowed, and has never had the benefit of a regular fixed income. Accordingly, the work it has accomplished must under the circum-

Digitized by Google

stances be regarded as truly extraordinary. Although the plans were drawn in 1865, it was not until 1891 that the addition to the Hospital was finally completed. Still later improvements have been the new out-patient building, on the corner of Old Harbor and Dorchester Streets, completed in 1901, of the committee in charge of which Dr. Gavin was chairman; while other activities include the establishment of a dental clinic for school children in 1912; the Training School for Nurses; the Carney Hospital Social Service; the Carney Hospital Sewing Guild; the Ladies' Aid Association, and the Columbus Day Nursery.

In the first fifty years of its existence, over 70,000 people have been treated in the Hospital itself, and over 300,000 in the out-patient department. In 1863, 53 patients received treatment; in 1912, nearly 4000; while the corps of physicians, surgeons, sisters, and nurses has, of necessity been increased in proportion, as the work of the Hospital has grown. In 1903, the Carney Hospital took a great step forward, and was the first hospital in New England to establish the system of continuous service of its staff members, with a permanent physician-in-chief and surgeon-in-chief.

Such in brief is the history of this institution, to which Dr. Gavin for so many years gave so unsparingly of his skill and of his time. The same

Digitized by Google

professional traits and traits of character which distinguished him, were always in evidence during that long period at the Carney, and the Sisters, his fellow physicians, and his patients there speak of him and his work with the greatest love and appreciation.

The Carney Hospital always meant much to Dr. Gavin. Not more than did the City Hospital it is true, but it was always dear to him. Because it is not so large an institution as the City Hospital, perhaps Dr. Gavin felt more intimately connected with it; and it is possible that his service meant more to the Hospital, and that, realizing this, he gave of the very best he had. While on the visiting staff, he was frequently called into the counsels of the Hospital by the Superiors, and his advice was requested and taken on many matters of its policy and operation.

Dr. John T. Bottomley, at present surgeon-in-chief of the Carney, says in connection with his work there as Dr. Gavin's colleague: —

I knew Dr. Gavin very well, both professionally and socially. I remember him chiefly for his gentle kindness of manner. This was never assumed, but was only a natural, genuine expression of the man's true self. I saw him most in contact with his hospital patients. In them he had a real, live, human interest and he was not only efficient in his professional attentions to them, but, what is even more lasting and more

Digitized by Google

comforting, he had, and showed, consideration for their feelings, and sympathy for their sufferings, — qualities which we cannot witness too often. Although he was a shrewd judge of men and things, he was very charitable in judging and speaking of others. I cannot recollect that I ever heard him say an unkind word to any one. He was a fine type of an Irish gentleman, clean, kindly, considerate, and charitable.

In addition to this long and fruitful connection with the Carney Hospital, Dr. Gavin was associated for many years with the St. Elizabeth's Hospital, where he was appointed attending physician in 1871. Soon afterwards he received the appointment of surgeon, and in 1880 became consulting surgeon, and later served as one of the trustees of the Hospital until his resignation in 1910.

Dr. Gavin was a member of the American Medical Association and of the British Medical Association, a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, a member of the Massachusetts Medical Society, of the Boston Society of Medical Improvement, and of the Boston Medical Society. For some years he was visiting surgeon at the Marcella Street Home, and he attended the Convent of the Good Shepherd, the Convents of Notre Dame in Roxbury and South Boston, and the Convent of the Sacred Heart, for many years. For a short time, with Dr. Edward N. Whittier, he was

Digitized by Google

United States Pension Examiner in the Boston District, and for three years, from 1888 to 1891, he held the position of Professor of Clinical Surgery at the Boston Polyclinic.

Although he undertook so many professional responsibilities, he most emphatically did not belong to that class of men who "spread themselves too thin," for he had one trait in his character which, of itself, made it wholly impossible for him to neglect, or even to slight anything which he had once begun. This trait was a desire for thoroughness which was almost a passion with him. He went to the bottom of the available professional knowledge on any point about which he had any doubt. The systematic training which he went through before commencing actual practice, was in itself characteristic of this trait of his character. Even as late as 1874, more than half a dozen years after he was successfully established, he took up research work at Harvard College, to broaden his knowledge on special subjects. He often had instruments constructed to suit his own ideas accurately, and early in his practice he purchased an elaborate microscope, and has referred in letters to the great fields of interest it opened for him. Thus, whatever he undertook, he carried through to the end, and so, in spite of innumerable demands upon him, he was always able to pre-

Digitized by Google

serve a mental schedule of his engagements and to devote to each of them in turn the amount of time necessary for the satisfactory performance of the duties which it imposed on him.

Dr. Gavin was frequently called upon to testify in court in cases involving the question of damages for personal injuries, and Mr. James E. Cotter states that both the Doctor's long experience and his skill as a surgeon rendered him a valuable expert witness, and that whatever testimony he gave in a case was listened to with respect, alike by the court, by the jurors, and by the opposing counsel.

What he said carried conviction with it, for no one could hear him without realizing that he was testifying without the slightest prejudice, either for one side or the other, and that what he said was the expression of an honest, sincere and intelligent opinion upon matters concerning which he was particularly well qualified to express his views.

It is interesting to note that upon those occasions when opposing counsel sought to entangle him, Dr. Gavin's keen mind and ready wit were displayed perhaps to their best advantage, and he either would avoid his questioner's trap altogether, or else would make it apparent to all that his knowledge of the subject was much more superficial than real.

Digitized by Google

With all these interests it is not surprising that Dr. Gavin found little time for writing of a professional nature. Yet he did, at various periods of his career, contribute occasional articles to medical and surgical publications. A list of these is as follows: —

In the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* for February 9, 1865 (vol. 72, page 47), may be found a note on "A Useful Disinfectant," dated Boston, February 1, 1865, and signed "M. F. Gavin, M. D., House Surgeon, City Hospital." This was followed by an article on "Comparative Statistics of Suicide" in the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* for December 24, 1868 (vol. 79, page 326), and by a paper on "Ganglion" in the same journal for December 2, 1869 (vol. 81, page 306), signed "M. F. Gavin, Surgeon to Out-Patients, City Hospital." This latter article shows a wide range of reading and contains references to French medical works, as well as to those of England and America.

For the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* of August 25, 1870 (vol. 83, page 119), Dr. Gavin wrote an article entitled "Case of Impacted Calculus in the Urethra. External Urethrotomy. Recovery." This article is interesting, not only for its subject matter, but also because one is reminded of Dr. Gavin's foreign degrees by the signature,

Digitized by Google

"M. F. Gavin, M. D., F. R. C. S. I., etc., Surgeon to Out-Patients, City Hospital, Boston."

His next paper is to be found in the *Journal* for June 16, 1874 (vol. 91, page 52). This paper, on "Three cases of Spina Bifida," was read, originally, before the South Boston Medical Club, and its signature is again interesting, as showing the varied character of Dr. Gavin's professional career, for this time he signs himself, "M. F. Gavin, M. D., Surgeon to Saint Elizabeth's Hospital."

From this time on, he was apparently too busy to do much writing, and it is not until November 11, 1886, that another article appears under his signature. This paper, "A Case of Supra-Pubic Lithotomy," is to be found in the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* (vol. 115, page 446), although prior to publication it was read, on October 4, 1886, before the Boston Society for Medical Observation.

On January 1, 1894, Dr. Gavin read another paper before the Boston Society for Medical Observation. This time, the subject was "The Medical Cure of Hydrocele," and the paper was followed by a general discussion, in which Dr. Gavin, Dr. George W. Gay, Dr. H. L. Burrell, and Dr. Maurice H. Richardson participated. The paper was subsequently published in the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, March 1, 1894 (vol. 130, page 210).

Digitized by Google

The last of Dr. Gavin's articles in the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* is to be found in the number for May 2, 1895 (vol. 132, page 437). It is entitled "A Case of Castration for Hypertrophied Prostate," and is also to be found in the *Medical and Surgical Reports of the Boston City Hospital* (6th Series, page 10), while another article by him is later to be found in these reports for 1900 (11th Series, page 158), entitled "The Work in Surgical Pathology of the Pathological and Surgical Departments, by M. F. Gavin, M. D., with the assistance of L. G. R. Crandon, M. D., W. C. Howe, M. D., and D. D. Scannell, M. D."

Besides the articles already enumerated, Dr. Gavin wrote an article in September, 1869, for *Appleton's Journal*, of New York, on "Comparative Statistics of Suicide," and contributed more than once to foreign publications, writing a number of articles when abroad for the London *Lancet*, and publishing in the *Dublin Medical Press*, in 1886, an article on "The Treatment of Burns."

In addition to his strictly professional writings, he made use of his ability in this line early in his professional career by writing a series of articles for the daily press treating of simple medical subjects in a popular style. During his service in the army, while stationed at the field hospital, he also contributed letters from time to time on subjects

Digitized by Google

of current interest, and wrote a series of articles on "Life at the Front" under the signature, "Abbeytown," the name of that part of the town of Roscommon in which he was born. He also contributed a number of interesting articles on "Life and Happenings in America" to the home papers of his native town and to some of the Dublin dailies, before professional work encroached too much on his leisure.

Dr. Gavin frequently assisted his friend, John Boyle O'Reilly, by writing for *The Pilot* in the early days, after Mr. O'Reilly had taken over the management of the paper. This is shown by the following interesting letters from Mr. O'Reilly.

THE PILOT,
BOSTON, *Aug.* 17, 1874.

DEAR GAVIN: —

I am going to Baltimore on vacation to-morrow. Can you write an article for the *Pilot*. If you can, will you give it to Mr. Donahue on or before Saturday afternoon? I shall be heartily obliged to you.

Always yours,
JOHN BOYLE O'REILLY.

M. F. GAVIN, M.D.

M. F. GAVIN, Esq., M.D.

MY DEAR GAVIN: —

I returned from New York yesterday with a bad cold and a swelled throat. I am better this morning, all but the throat. I can't go out to-day and I cannot do much for the paper. Will you write that article on

Digitized by Google

Harper's Magazine for me? If you possibly can, you will render me still more your debtor. If you do it, take it over to Donahue this evening or in the morning.

Very sincerely yours,
JOHN BOYLE O'REILLY.

Three other letters from O'Reilly may be of interest, as showing the warm friendship which existed between himself and Dr. Gavin.

Friday morning.

MY DEAR GAVIN: —

Get the March number of *The Dark Blue;* my "Dog Guard" is in it. Are n't you pleased? That is the top of the tree, old man. Twenty pounds for it, and they want more. I feel pretty much like Oliver Wendell Holmes to-day; and should you call to see me, please don't be too familiar at first; I feel dignified — "considerable."

If the *Dark Blue* were in Boston, I'd send you a copy, but they have not come yet.

Yours ever,
J. BOYLE O'REILLY.

THE PILOT EDITORIAL ROOM.
BOSTON, *May* 21, 1887.

DEAR GAVIN: —

Dr. X—— is a friend of mine, and a good fellow, and a good doctor, and the best heavy-weight gentleman-boxer in Boston.

If you will assist him, I shall vote for you when you want me to get you into Paradise.

Faithfully,
JOHN BOYLE O'REILLY.

Digitized by Google

Love to you, dear old man. I wish I could see you often as of old.

THE PILOT.
BOSTON, *April* 7, 1890.

DEAR GAVIN: —

Your kind letter has waited here for me nearly a month. Your words are kind and deeply gratifying and you are a dear old man.

Faithfully yrs,
JOHN BOYLE O'REILLY.

Dr. Gavin had little love for public speaking, and except for the above-mentioned papers which he read before medical clubs and societies, he made almost no public addresses. In the early days of the Catholic Union, when he was on the Council, he gave a lecture on "Food" before that organization, which showed a great amount of study and preparation, and was presented in an interesting and popular manner. Whenever possible, however, he preferred not to be called upon, and the accompanying letter from Dr. Dwight is an evidence of Dr. Gavin's traditional modesty and reticence in this regard.

DEAR DOCTOR: —

I suppose that I may take it on myself to reply to your note without referring it to the committee. I am sorry that you are not inclined to read your paper yourself, because I think it must suffer by being read by any one else, and I have no doubt your fears are

Digitized by Google

quite groundless. So please think it over. Still, if you insist, we shall be glad to have your paper on any terms and will find a reader. Please get it ready as soon as you can, and let me know when that will be.

Yours very truly,

THOMAS DWIGHT.

70 Beacon St., December 7th.

DR. GAVIN.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY OF DR. GAVIN'S PROFESSIONAL CAREER

DURING the last fifty years in the medical world, there has been a steady trend toward specialization; for a man to be, as Dr. Gavin was, both a general practitioner and a surgeon, is to-day practically unknown.

In his day, however, the standard was a very different one. Then a physician could almost, after the manner of Bacon, take the whole field of medicine for his province, and this, with regard to Dr. Gavin's career, is the first point to remember. He was eminent, not as a specialist in any single branch of his profession, but as a very excellent general practitioner, equally proficient in cases which called for medical treatment and in those which required surgical skill.

At the same time, it is necessary to guard against a possible misconception; for while it is true that the best medical opinion of to-day favors specialization, Dr. Gavin's reputation and achievements must not be undervalued on that account, for the real test, as a rule, is whether or not a man attains eminence according to the views and standards of

Digitized by Google

his day; and that test his fame is well able to withstand.

No doubt, if he had been born thirty years later, he would have attained the same distinction as a specialist which he achieved as a general practitioner. Yet it is not so easy to imagine him in the later and more modern rôle, since he was, by nature, ideally fitted for the work which he elected to perform. The whole world interested him; he was never wearied, never indifferent, never at a loss for occupation. To live was to him a wonderful and priceless privilege, to be regarded both seriously and reverently, and at the same time with an unquenchable and abiding joy. It was only natural that a man who took such an interest in life should find in the history of medical knowledge a most congenial field, and Dr. Gavin, with his keen and inquiring mind, loved to survey the entire domain of medical science, and to consider each isolated fact, and each separate theory, in relation to the subject as a whole.

One might, indeed, suppose that a man so busy with actual practice would have little leisure for study; yet Dr. Gavin was widely known as a genuine student of medicine, and his extensive reading and his power of keeping abreast of the times went far to prove that for the man who is really filled with enthusiasm for his profession there is no such

Digitized by Google

thing as "not having the time." He contrived to *make* the time, and not only managed to be thoroughly well-informed as to the present, but delved among the records of old times as few physicians ever do, partly from a genuine love of research, partly because he realized that it is only by completely understanding the past that we are enabled to appraise the present and to forecast the future. His medical library was a very fine one, and from the time of his studies abroad he was always a subscriber to the leading foreign medical papers and, as has been said, he kept in touch for years afterwards, through correspondence, with professors of the Royal College in Ireland. In the words of Dr. George W. Gay, a life-long friend of Dr. Gavin, "He had a great deal of professional enthusiasm, and was keenly interested in the progress of medical and surgical methods. His very wide range of reading, both in the past and in the present, made him a most interesting companion."

Thus, Dr. Gavin stood as a thoroughly able and successful all-around practitioner, — possessed of wide experience and great ability, and able to meet and to deal coolly and confidently with those unexpected emergencies which are continually arising in every doctor's professional life. Moreover he possessed his own individual personality, which won for him respect and confidence everywhere.

Digitized by Google

He never could make an unfavorable impression. At the first instant, perhaps, his quiet, retiring manner and unassuming bearing mi[illegible] strongly impress a stranger, but it did : long for this to be changed. Even his pers pearance would bring this about. Never cc about mere recent styles, he dressed in a unaffected manner, neither strikingly prof nor yet calculated to conceal his calling. H ments were never quick or boisterous, but quiet unconscious ease of the true gentlem clear, steady, straightforward gray eye, tl almost boyish color in his cheeks, and the ness of his smile, impressed one almost and when he spoke, his quiet, undemon but frank manner of speaking quickly c his hearers of his knowledge. So, ably i nature, one might say, for his calling, he perfection the rôle of the all-around do general practitioner.

To consider Dr. Gavin's professional atte more in detail, it is probably true that whil eminently successful as a physician, it is s geon that he will be best remembered. H natural aptitude for surgery, and in additic ing an able operator, he was celebrated fc markable excellence of his judgment. O chief characteristics was his caution in adv

Digitized by Google

operation. In the words of Sister Gonzoga, for many years Superior of the Carney Hospital, "Dr. Gavin was kind, conscientious, and when it came to a question of a serious operation, very conservative. When he said that an operation was necessary, the patient might rest assured that all other means had proved unsuccessful."

This conservatism with regard to operating was a natural trait of Dr. Gavin, yet it was doubtless intensified by the conditions prevailing when the Doctor first began practice. Dr. David W. Cheever has termed this period "the dark days of my youth," and an extract from his address at the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Boston City Hospital, in 1914, shows what the conditions were at that time, and in what manner they were remedied.

So [said Dr. Cheever] we stand to-day, honorable and honored, one of the best municipal hospitals in our country. This is no boastful record. It is strictly true.

But to me personally has everything always been so agreeable? Let me recall the dark days of my youth, when blood-poisoning cursed surgery, and death followed our hardest efforts. Let me give an example. During one winter I was called up here sixteen winter nights to relieve suffocation by opening the windpipes of children suffering from membranous croup, as diphtheria was then called. Heavenly relief and calm sleep followed. But how many cures? Within three days, twelve of the sixteen would die, and four recover. He who saved one in four did well; he who saved one in three was a hero.

Digitized by Google

Now, for 1913, the statistics of laryngeal diphtheria in our hospital show a mortality of 27.73 per cent, and of recovery 72.26 per cent. Formerly three out of four died. Now three out of four recover. . . .

The undiscovered appendix was causing fatal peritonitis without recognition and without redress. Acute peritonitis was almost always fatal. Compound fractures lay for months unhealed, and if they finally required amputation, amputation was often fatal; the mortality of thigh amputations at the middle third rising to 50 per cent. Wounds suppurated before they healed, and suppuration not infrequently ended in pyemia. . . .

Surgery was external or surface surgery. Tumors were removed, plastic operations begun, amputations practised, but I have seen a poor victim of a large burn on the back die of exhaustion because we knew not the possible relief of healing by transplanted skin.

A sombre picture, not overdrawn; and yet surgery was the only resort open; and the anxious and caretaking surgeon toiled and toiled, maintaining the cheerfulness of hope, which alone held death aloof.

Such were the conditions, when, half-way down my surgical journey, twenty-five years ago, asepsis dawned, and slowly, like a summer morning, brought on the perfect day, — gradually, little by little, step by step: first, carbolic antisepsis and carbolic spray, then corrosive sublimate, then heat, then alcohol, then dryness and sterilized gauze and gloves; then suppuration vanished, surgery became a joy, recovery was the rule, and death was often not unjustly ascribed to a failure of technic.

In consideration of these conditions, it was but natural for Dr. Gavin to be a prudent and con-

Digitized by Google

servative surgeon, and this fact was of inestimable benefit to the younger men who served under him. After the discovery of asepsis, and the resulting wonderful improvements in surgical methods, it was inevitable that a great wave of enthusiasm should result, and for a time it seemed that this wave had rolled too far, and that some of the junior surgeons, though with a perfectly sincere and righteous professional zeal, were rather inclined to make operations, not the exception, but the rule. This was where the wise counsel of Dr. Gavin and others of the older school was of the greatest benefit; and this story is told of the Doctor and a brilliant young colleague, who were discussing a case together. "So you think," said Dr. Gavin, "that an operation is necessary?" "Yes," his junior replied, "I have given the matter my best consideration and I believe that I should surely operate." Whereupon Dr. Gavin looked at him earnestly for a moment and then quietly queried, "What for?" The younger surgeon said afterward to a friend: —

The question took me completely aback and it was some time before I realized the depth of meaning which those two words contained. There was the whole matter put straight up to me. Was I going ahead because I saw a chance to perform a brilliant operation, because I was looking upon the matter simply from its surgical side, or was I, as I should have

Digitized by Google

done, and as Dr. Gavin always did, putting the welfare of the patient before anything else, as the one paramount consideration. It was a lesson that I have never forgotten, and never shall forget.

Another fact should be remembered in connection with these new surgical discoveries, — namely, that, while their importance can scarcely be exaggerated, it does not therefore follow that all the surgical wisdom of bygone days was rendered valueless by them. Dr. John T. Bottomley has well expressed this in speaking of Dr. Gavin who, he says, "Trained in an era preceding that which saw the introduction and wonderful spread of asepsis in surgery, adapted himself successfully to new principles and new surroundings, bringing with him, however, from the old, much that was useful, interesting, and sound. Thus he was valuable in advice and suggestion to us of a later generation. Not all that is novel is good."

However, though Dr. Gavin's first thought in surgery was caution, it did not follow that he was not an excellent surgeon, or that, in those cases which required an operation, he did not show a high degree of skill in that most delicate, but dangerous art. For he was, as has been said, a very excellent surgeon. Many, almost unnumbered, were the operations that he performed in his life-time; for many years, at the commencement of his career,

Digitized by Google

DR. GAVIN IN MIDDLE LIFE

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

without any of the present-day aids of surgery to assist him; and the results he obtained are shown in the proportions which his practice attained. Then, when the change came, his skill was able to follow the change, and he stepped into the new fields with the same sureness as before, the same clear perception of what was to be done, and the same steadiness of hand and delicacy of touch with which to do it. Some of his operations, then, were bold steps into the unknown, which pointed out the way for still later methods. But the intense interest of such work could never shake his fundamental principle, that the patient came first; and so it always stood with him.

It is interesting to observe another strong tendency of Dr. Gavin's professional work — the tendency to conservatism. In surgery he operated only when necessary for the patient's good. In medicine, he firmly believed that Nature herself was the greatest physician of all, and his practice always was merely to assist her. With him medicines were never the rule; as in surgery, they were given, and given with wide knowledge and rare skill, when really needed, but they were never prescribed when Nature herself could do the work.

As a consultant, especially in later years, he was widely known, and in reviewing his career, this particular branch of his profession should be em-

Digitized by Google

phasized. Time and again he would be called upon as a recognized authority to render the deciding opinion in a difficult case, where there was doubt on the part of the attending physicians. Summoned often as a last resort, his decision was regarded as final. In considering Dr. Gavin's professional work, it seems that the responsibility that such consultations entailed should be dwelt upon.

These visits in consultation required intense concentration, in an effort to penetrate ordinary symptoms which had proved deceiving or misleading to their observers; and the decision when made, naturally had more bearing on professional reputation than more private work; and all of this, in addition to the responsibility for the patient's recovery, which appealed most strongly to a nature like Dr. Gavin's. It might seem likely, that the nervous strain of a large amount of such work would develop qualities of irritability or sharpness, or perhaps, arrogance and conceit; but this was not true of Dr. Gavin. He never accepted such calls as a personal tribute. He went to them with the modest assurance of a broad experience, and he rendered his decisions simply, with no affectation and no hesitation. The compliment of the work apparently never struck him, and in spite of his deep consideration for the patient, his even temperament could not be shaken by any worry after he had given his

Digitized by Google

decision, as carefully considered "in the light of his own best judgment."

Perhaps a summary of the character of his professional work, his methods, and the motives behind them, can best be given in the precise words of men who knew him personally, men of the same profession who worked with, and under him. I quote, then, first from Dr. Frederick J. Cotton, who served under him at the Boston City Hospital. Says Dr. Cotton:—

Dr. Gavin was, so to speak, my god-father in surgery, and to no one is my debt greater. Many years ago now, I came to the Boston City Hospital a stranger, trained elsewhere, in other hospitals here and in Vienna. It was my good fortune to be assigned to Dr. Gavin's service. He cared little for what I had learned of surgical technic and less for my pathological training, though he was very nice about it. His efforts were directed to teach me the common sense of surgery; not largely represented in my equipment, but his real profession.

Dr. Gavin was never primarily a technician, and when I came under his hand, he was doing but little operating; the purely operative side of surgery never struck him, apparently, as worth much notice; that he regarded as simple professional equipment. He read omnivorously and discriminatingly; it was impossible to "stump" him on the newer developments, but he really cared for them only as they contributed to the things he cared for; the art of getting sick folks well by surgery.

It is most interesting to note the next portion of

Digitized by Google

Dr. Cotton's tribute, because it reiterates almost in the same words a point already emphasized from an entirely different source.

In the early days X—— and I were together under him. It was, "Dr. X——," or, "Dr. Cotton, will you kindly see to this patient; take full charge of him." This was all very well, but about four days later (mayhap no more than two) X—— or I would have the patient down on the operating floor, when there the chief would appear (from nowhere, which was an innocent trick of his) with an expression of child-like interest: "Dr. Cotton, I understand you are thinking of operating on that patient, C 24! Very interesting, Doctor! What for?" All of which meant that he had been watching quietly as always, and as closely as we had, and, with his broader vision, was doubtful what was wise. Nearly always the patient went back to the ward, and we had learned something: learned caution, even if we had not gotten at his clear notions of reasons for and against.

With his three decades and more of funded experience, added to native insight, he had developed, not only that judgment which is wisdom, but an almost uncanny perception. Again and again, on the ward visits have I heard, "Doctor, what's wrong with that patient?" in regard to some one about whom we had been academically complacent. And always something was wrong.

Never have I known a surgeon (and, one place with another, I have known not a few) with his curious gift of prognosis. He knew, as one of a previous generation put it, not only "what disease the patient had, but also what kind of a patient the disease had," with a disconcerting exactness that we, his juniors, never

Digitized by Google

quite understood. Always it was the patient, the human side, that interested him; that called forth his best thought; the result of his ripe experience and observation. It was Dr. Gavin's humanity, in the broadest and best sense, that was his most characteristic and, to my mind, his finest trait. He did not lack firmness in the least; he could and did fight and fight hard, on rare occasions, and he had that natural dignity that needs no safeguard and that got no care from him; but he never quarrelled; never was unappreciative; never unkindly. Even his instant Irish wit, his incomparable mastery of the drollery of phrase, never bit in.

Because of his deliberate effacement of himself in the service of which he was so vital a part, his value was not fully appreciated, I think, in an era in which the purely technical side of surgery loomed much too large. Just now we are swinging back with the pendulum to another period, when surgery is for the patient, not the patient for surgery, and it is a regret with me that the chief is not here to smile his quizzical, lovable smile at the change.

Dr. L. G. R. Crandon and Dr. D. D. Scannell both worked under, and afterwards with, Dr. Gavin at the City Hospital, in the later period of his life, and their statements are of interest.

Dr. Gavin [says Dr. Crandon] was of the old type surgeon and gentleman, always efficient, always practical, yet always formal and courteous. The memory of his ward visits is a joy. Accompanied by all his house officers he would speak to the first patient, saying to him as no one else could say it, "How are you this morning?" Then he would turn to the old house

Digitized by Google

surgeon, fix him with those pale blue eyes, and ask "How is this man?" This would be repeated, in substance, at every bedside.

Every other case would suggest some story, which he would tell us to carry the point which he wished to make. Rarely something ordered by Dr. Gavin would not be carried out. A very direct "Why was this not done?" to the house surgeon, accompanied by the blaze of those eyes, was usually enough for one term of service.

His lines of reasoning in diagnosis he would not run over aloud, after the manner of the present day. He was a man of few words and would pronounce his judgment after a few minutes' thought, tersely and with conviction. He would ask three questions, touch the patient's tongue with his finger, and then give an opinion which, in the light of subsequent development, constantly surprised us by its accuracy.

Two great lessons I have as a heritage from Dr. Gavin. The first of these he had to give us, in our youth and ignorance, many times. As a matter of tradition, or routine, or, worse still, mere ape-like imitation, we would carry out some procedure of examination, or operation, or other treatment; whereupon our chief would turn upon us with a twinkle in his eye, and in a very mild voice would say, "Why did you do that?" Then, if the house officer was of the quality which was worth teaching, the Doctor would say to him with an earnestness not to be forgotten, "Doctor, when I am about to do anything in surgery, I always ask myself, 'Why are you going to do this?' And if I cannot answer that question satisfactorily, I don't do what I was about to do."

The second lesson came from an episode in the amphitheatre. A junior surgeon was operating; a grave

Digitized by Google

matter for decision and action with relation to the case in hand suddenly arose. The junior surgeon put the question to many of his seniors seated in the exedra.

Many opinions were expressed, so various in fact, that one surgeon suggested that we should take a vote on the matter, to ascertain what mode of procedure the majority advised, whereupon Dr. Gavin broke in, "No, this is not a matter for a vote; Doctor X—— is operating, and he is solely and wholly responsible. He may listen to us, but he must decide for himself."

This point Dr. Gavin was repeatedly making in some form or other, saying that no one could carry out well a surgical procedure in which he did not himself wholly believe; and he repeatedly told his junior surgeons never to operate upon the orders of a superior unless the treatment so ordered was in accordance with the judgment of the one about to operate.

It is a constant profit and satisfaction to have been educated, in part, by this man. He taught and lived in loyalty to the principle which the Celtic race has contributed to civilization: "He is a friend of mine and that's enough."

Dr. Scannell says:—

It was my privilege to serve as house officer under Dr. Gavin, at the Boston City Hospital, for something over two years; and later, as a subordinate colleague, it was my further privilege to be associated with him for some six or seven years more. Dr. Gavin furnished a lasting and splendid example of what should constitute the ideal relationship between doctor and patient. Never impatient, never discourteous, never in too much of a hurry to listen to a proper history, he was a constant and impressive example of kindness. In a

Digitized by Google

hospital organization where the stress and pressure and amount of work tended to transform the resident medical staff into mere automatic machines, forgetful of the humanitarian side of medicine, he served, for those who were prone to forget, as a reminder that medicine, practised only as a science, must fall far short of its highest and truest ideals.

It was also characteristic of Dr. Gavin that he abhorred anything that savored of the slightest departure from the truth. Merciful and considerate to all, he had no place in his regard for the man who would deliberately lie. I cannot remember that I ever saw Dr. Gavin lose his equanimity and poise except on those occasions, happily few, when he found that some one had told him a downright lie; and then his few words were disturbingly cutting. In his dealings with his patients, he cared not what their religious beliefs might be, so long as the sick individuals were not disrespectful toward God, nor in the slightest degree sacrilegious.

He was the constant friend of the house officer, and was never too busy to offer him his best judgment and counsel as to his future. In a similar way he was of great assistance to his colleagues, because of his sound judgment and conservative methods. During the latter years of his life, the actual performance of surgery interested him but little, and he was quite content to allow the work to be done by the younger men. During these years, he seemed to take a greater interest than ever in the care of patients in the wards, after operations had been performed. I am certain that no house officer on Dr. Gavin's service will ever forget him for his splendid example of courtesy, patience, and all those qualities which go to make up a true "gentleman of the old school."

Digitized by Google

So, to summarize Dr. Gavin's professional career, there is the testimony of his colleagues and associates as to his skill and ability in all branches of his profession; as a surgeon, a physician, a diagnostician; as to his broadness and many-sidedness in his work, as to his experience and knowledge, and his preparation and thoroughness. All those who were brought in contact with him professionally acknowledge his right to be called eminent in his calling. Honored alike by his profession and the public, he earned the place that he made and continued to hold.

But there was much more than his skill and reputation. Dr. Gavin's career really began only when he had mastered the equipment, so to speak, and the experience of his calling. When he was able to use this knowledge, without hesitation or effort, merely as a means, not as an end, then he reached his true work, the life he was so wonderfully fitted for,—the art, as Dr. Cotton says, of "getting sick folk well." Here was the true fulfillment of his life's work. Not medicine first, but true feeling, and encouragement and sympathy for the patient; and then medicine, and the skill of the physician. He had no wish for professional fame as a brilliant surgeon or as a renowned consultant. He never considered himself at all in this regard, for all his efforts were directed—and his skill revealed itself

Digitized by Google

only in those efforts — to doing what good he could for those who suffered. Surely such is the life of an ideal physician, a true realization of that wonderful calling, "to heal the sick."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IX

BUSINESS AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES HOME, RECREATIONS, LIBRARY

DR. GAVIN was so busily engaged in the practice of his profession that he had, of necessity, little time to spare for other interests. Yet in his position it was inevitable that he should be urged from time to time to serve upon this or that directorate, or board of trustees; and occasionally, when he felt that his acceptance might be of some real benefit, he drew still further upon his already diminished leisure, and cheerfully added another care to those which he already had shouldered. Thus, as has been previously noted, he not only served as a trustee of the Boston City Hospital from 1879 to 1885, but in addition, when the Mattapan Deposit and Trust Company was organized in 1892, he was chosen as one of its directors, and for over twenty years remained upon the board, always displaying an active and intelligent interest in the transaction of the company's affairs. In the words of Ezra H. Baker, the president of the company:—

"His constant attendance at the meetings, his ad-

Digitized by Google

vice always kindly given, his unfailing courtesy and his devoted loyalty to the company and its officers made him a most valuable director. His long years of service have left us only the happiest and the sweetest memories, and our companionship with him must have influenced us all for the better. It is of no little benefit to have sat for over twenty years by the side of one who, while showing every consideration for the opinions of others, was conspicuous for his loyalty to his profession, his country, his friends and his faith."

Dr. Gavin was also elected, in May, 1872, a trustee of the Union Institution for Savings in Boston, and held this office for forty-three years, until his death, displaying again his ability and earnestness in looking after the duties he had undertaken to perform.

A point of interest with regard to Dr. Gavin was his non-participation in public life. He abhorred notoriety. He lived for his profession and for his family, and he had no desire to strive for honors, either in the business or in the political world. Yet this very reticence and the knowledge on the part of the Doctor's fellow citizens that he did not desire anything, made his influence all the greater. His opinion was looked for and valued in his city, and his name was sought on many committees. His suggestions and recommendations on the few occasions when he made them, were listened to with a respect and an attention

Digitized by Google

never vouchsafed to those who were known to be working merely for their own selfish ends.

In regard to social life, Dr. Gavin, as has been said, could not be regarded in the light of what is termed "a club man." This, however, was not because of anything misanthropic in his make-up, for he was the most friendly and sociable of men; but was due solely to the fact that as a busy physician in his profession, and as a man who spent what leisure he possessed in the enjoyment of an ideally happy family life, he had little time for other interests. With the Doctor's wide circle of acquaintance, however, it was inevitable that he should be asked to join various clubs, even if he had time to visit them but seldom; and so for many years he was a member of the Boston Athletic Association, and a member of the Papyrus Club, from those golden days when upon its rolls were the names of John Boyle O'Reilly, James Jeffrey Roche, Robert Grant, George Parsons Lathrop, Thomas Russell Sullivan, Francis A. Harris, George F. Babbitt, Robert Dwyer Joyce, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, John T. Trowbridge, Martin Millmore, and many others well known to all lovers of literature and art. These men were friends — most of them intimate friends — of Dr. Gavin, and many were the brilliant evenings spent at club dinners in those early days, after Francis H.

Digitized by Google

Underwood and Dr. Joyce proposed Dr. Gavin's name for membership.

In 1888, Dr. Gavin purchased the house at 546 Broadway, South Boston, which he occupied for the remainder of his life. Here, perhaps, the happiest years of all his life were spent, for here his family grew up around him. Assured of a large practice, he was here fully able to gratify his tastes and inclinations for the beautiful and the refined in his surroundings.

Home always meant much to Dr. Gavin. The broadness of his interests entered here as well, and the objects with which he surrounded himself were the results of his personal tastes and selection. The ornaments, pictures, clocks, bronzes, had all been purchased by him with thoughtful care; and to return in the evening after a long day's work and find himself surrounded by all these things, his own selections, meant much more to him than it could possibly have meant to other men, whose interests were elsewhere, and whose tastes were not capable of such an appreciation. But the inmates of his home, his family, meant most of all to him, for he truly loved his family, and loved to be with them.

So it was, that 546 Broadway came to mean all that it did to Dr. Gavin. Here his already large library was still further increased, and received a

Digitized by Google

place worthy of its value. His taste in art could here be satisfied, and the paintings and engravings which he had collected with so much care and thought, could here hang as he wished to see them. There was room for his collection of furniture and souvenirs, none of any great intrinsic value in themselves, but all a reflection of his own distinctive, unique, but perfect taste, which characterized everything he bought. It was here that he enjoyed so many happy hours in his library. With his cigar, so characteristic of him in his home life, surrounded by his books and his collections, he could at last enjoy some of the material comforts that had come to him with all the good that he had done for others.

But also Dr. Gavin loved his home because it gave him a fitting place in which to receive and entertain his friends, and the friends of his family. It was always a pleasure to him to have guests beneath his roof, and he received them with the courtly and hospitable bearing of the true gentleman. Persons without number who were fortunate enough in the past to have broken bread with Dr. Gavin speak with the utmost enthusiasm of the delightfully hospitable tone of those occasions. "It was a most hospitable home, and Dr. Gavin was an ideal host," says Miss Conway.

It was here at his own board that Dr. Gavin

766864A

Digitized by Google

displayed more freely than anywhere else his really unusual powers as a conversationalist. The subject, to be sure, had to be to his liking; he had small relish for the trivialities of gossip; but let the talk turn upon books, or music, or history, or upon the world's great wars, or upon any genuine movement of interest, and the doctor would discourse with knowledge and wisdom and charm, drawing upon the storehouse of a well-stocked and retentive memory to furnish an illustration, or to prove an argument. His manner of conversation was always frank and unaffected, and few subjects of importance could be discussed with which he did not show a close acquaintance. Possessed of a deep fund of humor, and a keen but kindly wit, he was able to derive much enjoyment from the humorous side of existence, and when he chose, he could enliven his conversation with a story or anecdote, in which the humor would be suggested with incomparable delicacy.

The broad scope of Dr. Gavin's conversation is illustrated by Mrs. P. A. Collins, widow of the late Mayor of Boston, Patrick A. Collins, with whom, and with whose family Dr. Gavin was for many years on terms of friendly intimacy. She says:—

Honored by his associates, in a profession to which he himself gave honor, few outside it can add to his high record of achievement as a doctor of medicine.

Digitized by Google

It is the man, the friend, who claims us most of all, as we knew him since the early seventies; the kindly, cheerful, cultured gentleman whose broad and catholic mind embraced an intimate and comprehensive knowledge of the fine arts. Indeed it was always a source of wonder to us, how he could, in a life so crowded with professional achievements, find time to keep pace with all that was best in literature, music, and art. Dr. Gavin at home and abroad was the center of a circle of congenial friends who will forever hold his memory in affectionate regard.

Both Doctor and Mrs. Gavin were widely known for their hospitality, and for the pleasure which they felt in entertaining friends. Visiting at their house was sure to be a pleasure, and here might be met most interesting people, for Dr. Gavin's interests were wide, and his friends and acquaintances were scattered over the globe. Professional men, men of business, musicians, artists, writers, all were to be found there at times, and, as Miss Conway adds, "He had many friends among the bishops and priests throughout the country. One might meet at his house a missionary bishop from the far East or the Philippines, or the Metropolitan of an American see."

Among some of Dr. Gavin's more intimate friends were John Boyle O'Reilly, Monsignor Wm. Byrne, D. D., Monsignor Denis O'Callaghan, Rev. J. J. McNulty, Hon. P. A. Collins, Thomas J. Gargan, "Tom" Riley, Michael Anagnos, of the Per-

Digitized by Google

kins Institution for the Blind, who for years was a near neighbor, and many others; true friends, all of them, whose companionship Dr. Gavin loved.

The doctor greatly enjoyed his several trips to Europe. After he commenced practice in 1867, he made one short and hurried visit to his old home in 1870; and after that it was not until 1883 that he was able to take the time to visit the Continent. In that year he enjoyed a hurried but comprehensive trip with Mrs. Gavin, through most of the important countries of Europe, and great indeed was his delight to see actually, for the first time, many of the battlefields of history, and the treasures of art with which he was already so familiar through his library. Not until 1902 could he again steal three months from the incessant demands of his work; and this time, he was able to show all of his family some of the same sights he had seen almost twenty years before.

With regard to recreation, the Doctor's views were again characteristic. He worked hard himself, yet he realized that both body and mind, to be at their best, must be constantly relaxed, replenished, and refreshed. He himself gained relaxation chiefly from his books, to be soon mentioned, but he was, at the same time, a lover of out-of-doors, of nature, and of wholesome sport. In his youth he liked to sail and row, to swim and dive.

Digitized by Google

He was extremely fond of riding during his early practice, and through all his active life, enjoyed driving himself, and his horse was always a pleasure to him. Handball was a favorite pastime with him; he played it in his youth, and in later life with his children and his friends, and was always a dangerous competitor, since he was equally skillful with his right hand and with his left. He was, in fact, naturally adapted to sports or games, where the same qualities necessary for success in surgery are required, namely, a cool head, a steady hand, and ability to study a subject and learn the proper mode in which to master it as well as the great faculty of never becoming disheartened or confused, but of keeping one's self in constant readiness to meet a difficult situation with courage and confidence. He was also a good bowler and played a fair game of billiards. Yet he took none of these amusements seriously; his higher enthusiasms he reserved for Nature. Here, the wonder and the beauty of the world called forth all the reverence of the capacity for admiration in the Doctor's heart. He loved the glory of the sunset, the mystery of the dawn, the great clouds in the heavens, the immensity of the constellations, the delicate verdure of field and forest, the magnificent pageant of the changing year. Tree and flower, bird and beast, he knew them all by name, and delighted to wit-

Digitized by Google

ness God's handiwork, and to see each separate portion of the universe uniting to complete the vast and well-ordered whole.

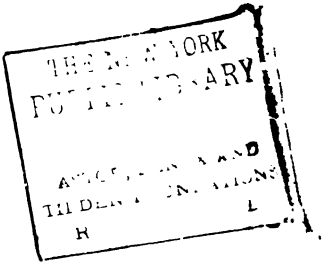
So it was, that, after his illness in 1886, Dr. Gavin gladly welcomed his friend Dr. Whittier's suggestion of a vacation, and began those fishing and hunting trips in which he took so much delight and enjoyment and which brought him so many pleasant companionships and happy memories.

The first trip was made in the spring of 1887, when Father McNulty, Father Wilson, "Dan" Barry, and Dr. Gavin went to Lake Mooselookmaguntic. At that time the interior of Maine was sparsely settled and everything was more primitive than it is at the present day. The party left Boston on a Monday morning, arriving at the Elmwood Hotel at Phillips in the evening; and after spending the night there, went on the next morning by stage, and reached Rangeley about eleven o'clock in the forenoon. After lunch they crossed the lake by steamer, walked in through the woods, a rough road in those days, and about four o'clock in the afternoon reached Lake Mooselookmaguntic, their final destination. Here they established headquarters and they made daily fishing trips in various directions. A favorite route of Dr. Gavin's from this camp was to start in the morn-

Digitized by Google

IN CAMP AT "THE BIRCHES"

Digitized by Google


THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

Digitized by Google

ing, equipped with luncheon, and fish leisurely down to Bemis, where he would spend the night and on the following day fish back over the same ground, arriving at the camp in the evening.

The initial trip, in 1887, was so successful and enjoyable that it was supplemented, that fall, by a hunting trip to Phillips, Maine, and from then on, for nearly twenty years, these outings became a regular semi-annual event in Dr. Gavin's life and proved of the utmost benefit to him. Many were the camps the travelers visited; even if the fishing or hunting had proved excellent the year before, their spirit of exploration led them continually to try new fields, and few were the out-of-the-way corners of Maine where hunting or fishing was good, that they did not know. Some of the members of the party were not able to go every year, but the nucleus comprised Dr. Gavin, Father McNulty, and "Dan" Barry, none of whom missed a semi-annual trip until the sickness and death of Father McNulty ended them for all time.

Once embarked upon the train, from the North Station, Dr. Gavin seemed absolutely to leave all care and responsibility behind him and enjoyed himself as though a boy again. Indeed, the prevailing atmosphere of those trips was one of mirth and genial jollity. Occasionally, however, an event of a more serious nature would intervene; as when,

Digitized by Google

on a camping expedition, Dr. Gavin was once aroused at midnight to cross the lake, and go with such remedies as he had at hand to the assistance of a fellow sportsman who had been seized with a sudden and dangerous illness. The vigil lasted all night, and it was not until after sunrise that Dr. Gavin returned, thoroughly wearied but happy in the knowledge that he had saved his fellow camper's life. Another incident is told of the Doctor's being hurriedly summoned to cross the lake again upon a surgical case. No surgeon's knife was available but the operation, performed with an ordinary camp knife, proved entirely successful.

The letters from Dr. Gavin written on these trips showed an active interest in sport, and here again his natural aptitude stood by him, for his keen eye and cool hand made him an excellent, almost a "dead sure" shot; but they revealed even more his love for Nature, and his delight to be out in her wilds. Here it was that everything interested him: the growing things of every description, the names of almost all of which he knew, the birds, the smaller animals that might appear near the camp, even the habits of the fish themselves; so that, although started at first by chance upon these trips, he found them, once undertaken, eminently suited to his nature and tastes.

Digitized by Google

Throughout the whole of Dr. Gavin's life he had an intensely strong love for music. In his bachelor days he played much upon the piano, and even for a while tried the violin, although these accomplishments slipped away from him under the pressure of later work. The intense eagerness to hear opera which he displayed in those early days continued through his later life, and many were the enjoyable evenings at his house when music was played for music's sake alone.

Together with Dr. Gavin's love of music should be noted his fondness for flowers. As early as his twentieth year there is evidence of an established bent in this direction, which continued throughout his life; and when he first moved to his new house at 99 Broadway, he commenced to improve his garden in the rear of the house. His letters on the growth and success of his enterprise are both interesting and illuminating in the light which they throw upon his tastes and inclinations; and when he moved to 546 Broadway, his garden there was again a pleasure to him. A love of flowers such as his was surely in perfect harmony with his life.

There remains finally to be considered, under the head of recreation, what was undoubtedly, outside of his family and his profession, the strongest interest in Dr. Gavin's life, namely, his library. It was a large one, but was not ordered by the foot

Digitized by Google

or yard to harmonize with the color-scheme of the room, like the libraries of which Mr. MacGregor Jenkins tells; every book in it was the Doctor's personal selection, and had been read, or partially read at least, by him. He knew his books as he knew his intimate friends; he knew the place each occupied on his shelves; he could turn to chapter or page to verify a quotation, or to find a favorite passage. Great was his contentment, when in the evenings he could sit in his library, always with his companionable cigar, and read for several hours. It was invariably his custom to have several books to finish at the same time. He never read through one until it was finished, but would begin a new one while several others were yet unread, and so carry them along together, perhaps reading from one during a few minutes snatched at the end of a busy morning, from another for half an hour in the late afternoon, and probably finishing a third in the evening. The result was, that the space around his favorite chair was always piled high with books: those in process of being read, those about to be read, and those just finished; while on the chair itself would generally lie some of the many magazines to which the Doctor was a subscriber, and which helped to keep up his knowledge of the march of the world's events.

His range of reading was, of course, extremely

Digitized by Google

wide. To him reading was the greatest of pleasures. He read though, not only for his enjoyment, but to broaden his mind, to increase his knowledge of events, places, and things, to render his mind even more active, to be better able to cope with the vexing problems of daily life, to further his knowledge of all that was enjoyable, good, and useful in life.

His fondness for literature pertaining to Ireland has already been mentioned, and his collection of books on Ireland was one of the most complete that could be found; but it was not alone the story of his native land that attracted him; and he was an eager student of all history, both ancient and modern. Upon his shelves were Gibbon and Motley, Green and Guizot, Prescott and Parkman, Fiske and Carlyle. With regard to American history he centralized his attention upon the conflict between the North and the South, in which he himself had borne a part. Nor was there anything partisan in his attitude; he appreciated the sincerity and the ability of the Confederate leaders, and read and studied the careers, not only of Grant and Sherman and Sheridan, but also of Longstreet and Jackson, of Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee. Thus he was thoroughly well informed with regard to the history of those times. In the words of Mr. James E. Cotter, "I know of no man who could de-

Digitized by Google

scribe more vividly and more interestingly events which transpired during the Civil War. He was apparently familiar with every standard work written on that subject, and had a remarkable faculty of portraying the principal characteristics of nearly all of the Union commanders."

Biography and autobiography were also most interesting to Dr. Gavin. He collected the works of soldiers, statesmen, artists, scientists, saints, and travelers; Plutarch's *Lives*, the diaries of Pepys and Evelyn, Boswell's *Johnson*, Chesterfield's *Letters*, — all of these he enjoyed; while for Napoleon's genius in particular, he had the greatest admiration. He possessed many volumes dealing with the famous Corsican's career, and it was characteristic of his thoroughness and openmindedness, that on one of his trips to Europe he took pains to visit the field of Waterloo twice, the first time with an English guide, the second with a French one.

Dr. Gavin read his books to remember. He pondered over the information he gained, and he appreciated it. It was stored away in his retentive memory, to be used in earning his reputation as a conversationalist, or for the broadening and deepening of the powers of his judgment. It is almost impossible to choose and select, in an attempt to give an idea of his taste in reading. He was truly

Digitized by Google

omnivorous, to use the term for his general reading which Dr. Cotton has applied to his professional reading, with the single qualification that he cared not at all for literary "trash" and had no curiosity to read so-called "popular" books. His taste was always for works worth while, either in subject-matter or in style, and his paramount desire was to acquaint himself, in Arnold's phrase, with "the best that is known and thought in the world."

Practically every department of human art and knowledge was represented in his library: Religion, Science, Travel, Music, Architecture, Art, History, Fiction, Poetry, Literary History, and Criticism. The Doctor had an interest in all these subjects. Addison, Bacon, De Quincey, Hunt, Ruskin, Hazlitt, Macaulay, Lamb, and Holmes, were among his essayists: Lytton, George Eliot, Balzac, Hugo, De Maupassant, Thackeray, Irving, Dickens, Cooper, Goldsmith, Poe, Lever, Dumas, and Hawthorne among the novelists. Shakespeare stood supreme in his regard among the poets, but there were as well, the works of Milton, Pope, Byron, Burns, Coleridge, Chaucer, Moore, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Whittier, Dryden, Holmes, Goethe, Dante, Lowell, Scott, Virgil, and Longfellow.

In addition, however, to the works of the great authors, which every booklover admires, and en-

Digitized by Google

deavors to include in his collection, there were hundreds of other books, which, gathered into Dr. Gavin's library, were a visual evidence of the broadness of his tastes and interests. Books by friends like Richard Malcolm Johnson, or Jane Barlow, or Mary Elizabeth Blake, or John Boyle O'Reilly, or by the children of the friends in whom he took a great interest, as Myra Kelly or Hal Godfrey. Books on modern inventions and sciences in which it might hardly be supposed the Doctor would have been interested, but all of which he had read. Joel Chandler Harris's "Uncle Remus" stories, the *Jungle Books* of Kipling, and the books of Ernest Thompson Seton, which the Doctor loved to read to his children; and he himself loved stories of animals, even simple stories, when well-written, of dogs, or birds, or bears, and hunting; and very many were his books on exploration and adventure. Tales of the Maine woods, and the wilds of the Canadian Northwest; Dr. Fridtjof Nansen's *Farthest North*, and Du Chaillu's *Wild Life under the Equator; Two Years Before the Mast*, Stanley's and Livingston's works, and books of cruises and travel to all parts of the world,—all these representing Dr. Gavin's love of this particular branch of reading. There were books of travel in civilized lands, on the scenery of Switzerland and Norway, *Scenes in Holland*, *The Great*

Digitized by Google

Cathedrals of Europe, and *The West from a Car Window*. Books for his children were there in profusion: the fairy stories of Hans Christian Andersen, and Grimm, and Andrew Lang; the books of Louisa M. Alcott and Bret Harte, Peter Parley's and Oliver Optic's Annuals; and then the books of G. A. Henty and Thomas W. Knox, for them to read a little later on. There were books on art and music; *The Music of the Modern World*, besides bound copies of *Le Monde Illustré*, to which Paris journal he had been a subscriber for years, the French poets, books on military tactics, *The North American Indian*, *The Wealth of Nations*, *The American Electoral System*, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, mythology, memoirs, archæology, and books on special periods of history. *Famous Sayings*, the *Arabian Nights*, and books of special interest on historical places. A select few of the more modern novels, as *Quo Vadis*, and *David Harum*, which latter the Doctor really enjoyed; Kipling's *Plain Tales* and some of Winston Churchill's books. Very old copies of Horace and Cicero and Cæsar, picked up by Dr. Gavin during the time of his study in Paris, stood beside modern editions of Homer, and the Greek dramatists. Marion Crawford's works, and the books of Mrs. Hugh Frazer, both of which writers Dr. Gavin liked; the biography of Cardinal Vaughan, and the life of Disraeli; the works of

Digitized by Google

Canon Sheehan, and some of the more recent books of Robert Hugh Benson and Asycough. A wonderful collection, covering a vast variety of subjects, and ranging from the earliest literature to the good works of the present day.

The Doctor's collection of medical works was quite as complete and as thorough as his general library. All the standard works were there, but they again only formed a small part of the whole. With the same discriminating taste, he added to his medical library a variety of books covering the greatest possible field, and of the greatest possible interest.

And thus Dr. Gavin's library was formed,—a tribute to the depth and bigness of his life. He could well indeed have borrowed Lowell's phrase, and have said of himself, "I am a bookman."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X

HIS CHARACTER

DR. GAVIN possessed a wonderful personality. It revealed primarily his sincerity and his love of truth. He was sincere with his Creator, sincere with himself, and sincere with every one with whom he was brought in contact. This sincerity was extraordinary in its absolute freedom from any ulterior motives.

A crystal mind, a shining soul, an integral being, a clear-cut personality [writes a friend]. He was always what he seemed to be. If we had a peerage, that ought to be the test, and how few peers we should have! He had a clear perception of the existence and the omnipresence of God, and from this resulted his sincerity, his love of reality, and of truth. He had a clear native insight into existence, and was conscious that he was a part of it; this explains his self-poise, his dignity, his balanced judgment and also the persistence of those traits during the last stern years, when as a profound physician he must have realized the finger of God, but beyond, saw God himself.

This fundamental sincerity of Dr. Gavin's nature led to his love of God, and so of all God's works; his fellow man, nature, the beautiful. This love of his Creator was ever present throughout his life,

Digitized by Google

though never thrusting itself forward, sometimes hardly to be detected, but always there, underlying his nature, his life, his work. Clearly and logically the conclusion followed — his love for all God's creation, of which examples and evidences have been given; his enjoyment of true friends, his efforts to aid his patients, to which medicine and all its branches were merely an end, his love of the open, the woods, flowers, music, art; all these things were good, were essentially sincere, and Dr. Gavin loved them.

In a nature so sincere, and filled with appreciation of the true, the beautiful, and the good, there are necessarily most estimable qualities. The first of these was devotion. Dr. Gavin was fundamentally religious, but his religion was never narrow. His life itself was a religion, the religion of a man sincere in his convictions, energetic, persevering in the good that he did, genuinely inspiring in the example he furnished to others. On rare occasions, when the need was apparent and the spirit willing, Dr. Gavin, it was said, could put such real religious fervor into a few words at the bedside of a dying patient, that no such call could go unheeded. His daily life exemplified his Church's teachings in love, charity, faith, and hope, and kindness to all. His pastor for twenty-five years, Reverend Robert J. Johnson, sums up his opinion of Dr.

Digitized by Google

Gavin by saying, "He was an ideal parishioner, an ideal Catholic, and an ideal man."

Here and there throughout these pages attention has been drawn to the different ways in which his natural kindness was manifested. It was shown not only in Dr. Gavin's private life but in his professional work as well. Dr. E. S. Boland says of him:—

> He was singularly helpful to the younger men and they were quick to appreciate his kindliness and gladly availed themselves of his counsel. He had himself been through the experiences of the general practitioner, from the humble beginnings to the final establishment of a large and successful practice, so that he knew just what problems the younger men were facing; and as an older brother might aid a younger he was always ready with wise and sound advice to assist those who were just beginning their professional careers.

This quality is testified to by many others of the older colleagues of Dr. Gavin; and, of course, most gratefully by the younger men who directly benefited through it in their professional lives. To his patients and their welfare Dr. Gavin showed the most intense loyalty. The question of recompense was the last to be thought of by him, and the poor man and the rich man ranked alike in his eyes. If anything, the poor man received even more prompt attention, for he might not have had the temporary relief that his more fortunate brother could pay

Digitized by Google

for. Countless examples of deeds done by him in this direction might be given, — of medicines furnished, of nurses who sometimes mysteriously appeared, of bills forgotten; but such things may better be left to the imagination, or to the memory of those who knew Dr. Gavin, rather than spoken of here. He would rather have it so. "He joyfully served the poor," is the way Miss Katherine E. Conway fittingly expresses her thought of this phase of his character; and this phrase is a summary, an epitome of innumerable kindly words and deeds extending from first to last, over the whole half-century of Dr. Gavin's professional career.

His thoughtfulness might well be classed with his kindliness. "Thoughtful of those about him," is a phrase that might be used to designate the true gentleman the world over, and it might well be applied to Dr. Gavin. He was thoughtful always of the little things, the finer points of delicacy, forgotten or overlooked by most men. For instance, after his return from his European studies, he arranged an interchange of correspondence and photographs between the Royal College of Surgeons and the Surgeon-General of the United States Army, which, from letters on both sides, proved to be most interesting and profitable to both participants. In like manner he introduced a correspondence between his American and European

Digitized by Google

professors, Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes and his friends at Dublin, which, according to their letters, was mutually most welcome. These thoughts of the pleasure of others, of their welfare, were most characteristic of him.

Courtesy was a part of Dr. Gavin's nature, courtesy such as is rarely shown to-day, — a true, natural, instinctive, old-world courtesy. "His 'You're welcome, sir,' will stay in my heart, forever, sweet as the odor of old rose," writes a friend of his later years. "His 'Good morning, and how are you to-day?' was justly famous; the most dolorous and discouraged patient felt its magnetic sympathy, and was aroused to cheerfulness under its kindly influence," writes Miss Fairbanks, Matron of the Convalescent Home, and for many years associated with Dr. Gavin at the City Hospital. In his home, and in his profession, his genial courtesy was an inborn part of his nature.

It is necessary to mention also Dr. Gavin's modesty, his utter intolerance of any self-promotion purely for personal ends. There was, however, no false modesty, no deprecating praise that was justly due, but no suggestion of any attempt to seek mere fame or notoriety. Together with this characteristic of modesty may be mentioned the purity and probity of his life, an example and an inspiration to those about him.

Digitized by Google

And then there was the keen insight and clear perception which he displayed both in private and professional life. His absolute sincerity with himself and all things, together with his alertness, gave him an unclouded vision, undimmed by any deflecting influence. So from this character of pure sincerity, there follows the devotion, the kindliness and courtesy, the modesty and purity, and the clearness of vision that produced the man who won and kept the affection of all who knew him.

It is needless to speak of his friendships, except to say that they were such as a man of his nature would naturally make, and make to hold. They were made with natures which felt and acted as his did, and made with that clear insight which was not mistaken, so that they lasted until death. Yet though his acquaintances were legion, as is often true of the rarest natures, his intimates were few.

The qualities of Dr. Gavin's character so far enumerated were those which won for him the affection of all who knew him; but balancing these qualities were still others which explained the esteem and respect in which he was held by all.

One of these was his fairness, — to be expected from a man of his sincerity, — which gave him his

Digitized by Google

true sense of justice and the charitableness of his judgment. Dr. W. A. Dunn says: —

He was so humane and charitable that he was always willing to make allowances for the faults or mistakes of others when these were accidental, and was always ready to "give a man the benefit of the doubt." Yet he was also so just a man that the intentional wrong-doer could not hope for toleration at his hands. He was essentially just and possessed in a marked degree the true judicial temperament. His judgment on men and things was never hasty, never prejudiced and tempered with the great quality of common sense and ability to survey a subject from all sides in turn, and so to render an intelligent opinion.

In administering the affairs of the City Hospital [said a colleague] it was inevitable that there should be at times important questions of policy to be debated and decided upon. Sometimes there were marked differences of opinion among those responsible for the action taken; but Dr. Gavin was one man who was always to be depended upon and who was always to be found instinctively, as it were, both speaking and acting in favor of what was just and sensible and right.

Another friend writes: "I recall so well his calm, searching eye and his unfailing judgment on any topic, his sharp criticism of all that was wrong."

This quality of justice brought out his intense hatred and repugnance to all lies, to all things false and mean, and revealed his courage, strength and independence, in support of all that he thought right, — qualities which he displayed in early childhood and which always remained a vital part

Digitized by Google

of his nature. By one casually meeting him, it might not be thought that his kindly, courteous exterior concealed the strength he possessed, the inflexible will and purpose concerning an aim or an ideal. Dr. D. F. Lincoln, an acute observer of human nature, however, struck the keynote of the Doctor's character when he perceived, as he says, fifty years ago, that in Dr. Gavin's case "gentleness and sweetness did not mean weakness."

This same idea couched in different terms has been expressed by another colleague:

> Occasionally men of a somewhat domineering nature who chanced to be brought in contact with Dr. Gavin would be misled by his apparent mildness and amiability, and would attempt, in the vernacular, rather to tread upon the Doctor's toes. Yet it is of great interest to observe that no man, even the very ablest and most enterprising, was ever known to try this experiment a second time.

It is hardly necessary to observe that Dr. Gavin's strength of character should in no way be confounded with stubbornness. It sprang, rather, from the fact that the Doctor firmly believed in certain broad standards of speech and conduct, to which he conformed and to which he expected others to conform as well. Not that these standards had about them anything which savored of his own individual ideas. They were simply the standards recognized, at least in theory, throughout the length

Digitized by Google

and breadth of the civilized world; standards of purity and decency, of honesty and energy, of character and kindliness; standards in which most profess to believe, but which many, either through weakness or carelessness or downright wickedness, fail utterly to attain. The following quotation from one of Dr. Gavin's letters to an intimate friend outside of Boston, is an example of his strength of character.

I told you in my last letter of the meeting to take place at City Hall to-day regarding a change in the laws concerning certain matters of the City Hospital. I was present and the newspapers have report of the proceedings. . . . I was sorry to be opposed to all the doctors there, but I felt my convictions were strong and acted according to my best judgment. . . . When principle is at stake, I believe in doing one's duty even if the odds are against you. There is satisfaction in doing what we feel and think to be right, even if social ties are snapped.

His loyalty and perseverance have been previously touched upon, but these qualities were so strong, so forceful a part of him that they deserve to be mentioned independently.

His self-poise was truly characteristic of him; always equable, apparently never hurried, sparing of speech, quiet, dignified, gentle, the word "gentleman" leaps instinctively to the lips of those who knew him. With him, the outward courtliness was the true manifestation of the spirit within. One

Digitized by Google

might well say that if he had tried he could scarcely have been anything else.

Such were the major qualities forming Dr. Gavin's individual personality; a personality unified, balanced, and consistent, as rare as it was true and real. It won for him success and honor as the world views them.

Different people have their own views of success, however. Some set fame as a goal, others wealth, others, of a higher mind, the good which a man may do. By all of these standards, Dr. Gavin was successful. But is there not another test of true success? What matters it to a man, though wealth or fame or respect be his, if he himself remains unsatisfied, realizing that the true criterion is not the judgment of the world, but whether or not he himself has made the most of the ability which has been given him? Might it not be said that no man should be called entirely successful, who, being honest, straightforward, and sincere with himself and with those about him, cannot truthfully say that he is satisfied and contented? It might be argued that events over which a man has no control bring happiness or unhappiness; but is not he the true philosopher of life, whose judgment enables him to avoid the mistakes of the majority of men, and whose philosophy makes him content with the outcome of his choice when he has made

Digitized by Google

a decision, and whose aims and ambitions are perfectly attuned to his own capabilities and limitations? Has not such a man, successful in just what he has striven to do, striving for no more, happy in his own life, in what his own best judgment tells him he is fitted for, with the philosophy to regret no other choice, with will and insight to have made few unhappy mistakes, delighting in what is around him, the beauty of the world, the comfort of true friends, the joy of work, — has not such a man truly attained success so far as this life can give it?

Surely such a life was Dr. Gavin's. He was beyond question fitted for the work he did, for the time in which he lived. He fully realized this, and was happy in his work, was content with his life, his friends, his home. He strove for no new worlds to conquer, he lived his life as it was given him, to the full. Undoubtedly he had his full share of disappointments and discouragements; he fully realized the frailty of human nature, but, with an optimism that overpowered all vexations, he was happy in the good that there is in life. His aims and ideals were the highest and he lived up to them; he never wavered, never compromised, never shirked. With the fundamental sincerity of his nature, he was just what he appeared to be; he enjoyed all about him that was worth enjoying; he

Digitized by Google

made the most of all that was given him, and was satisfied.

Dr. Gavin passed peacefully to his eternal reward on May 20, 1915. Three score and ten years, the allotted period, had passed. For him the whole wonderful adventure, with its joys and its griefs, its successes and its disappointments, its work and its play, was ended.

In his case there was no untimely fate at life's fair beginning, no tragedy of youth cut short, or of a life snatched away in manhood's prime. He had lived a full life with honor. He had "fought the good fight" and "had kept the faith," and for him were realized the words of the poet, —

> Death is a path that must be trod,
> If ever we would pass to God.

Why then much grief when a life has been lived which leaves so little to regret, so much to remember of goodness and kindness accomplished? Dr. Gavin faced his sickness and his death as he faced all life's troubles, manfully, readily, and unafraid. Surely the end of such a life has little of sorrow, but is filled to overflowing with joy and triumph; and some such thoughts as these must have been in the minds of those who filled the Church of the Gate of Heaven on May 24, 1915, to bid their last

Digitized by Google

farewell to all that was mortal of Michael Freebern Gavin.

There were physicians there to do him honor, renowned for their professional standing and for their lives spent in doing good. A body of men they were, than whom few more eminent in their calling could be assembled. They were there to pay the last tribute in their power to their colleague, whom they had known and honored for so many years.

There were the younger men in the profession, men who were then pressing forward to take the places of their elders. They too were there to give testimony to their regard for the man who had guided many of them in the first beginnings of their work, and who had been always patient and considerate and helpful and kind. As sons who reverence a father, these young men came to honor him who had been their teacher and beloved guide.

There were friends there also; men who had known Dr. Gavin for years; who knew his ideals, his likes, his work, who knew the places that he loved, and the people and the things he cared for; who knew some of the good that he had done, quietly and unobtrusively.

Yet representative as all these men were, they formed but a small portion of those who filled the

Digitized by Google

church. There were men and women and children of all walks of life, from the highest to the lowest; people of diverse races and of different creeds; people who remembered that kind physician who had obeyed the mandate of the Master, and who had performed his daily tasks earnestly and reverently and yet joyfully, and who had truly "gone about doing good." A glance hither and thither throughout that throng, seeing here and there a trembling hand brushing away a tear from age-dimmed eyes, or the moisture on even a strong man's cheek, surely revealed something of what Dr. Gavin's life had been.

While there have been men whose lives have been far more adventurous, who have had careers more spectacular and more dramatic, who have been swayed for evil and for good by more worldly passions, yet it would be no easy task to name any who have led lives of greater beauty and more in keeping with God's commandments, who have won in so great measure the love and respect of their fellow men.

Dr. Gavin's life is ended. At Holyhood he sleeps "his last long quiet sleep." Yet the influence of such a life will long endure, and the memory of the good he did in his quiet, dignified, sincere way will stand as an indestructible monument to his memory. No one who knew Dr. Gavin can help

Digitized by Google

striving to lead a life more like his, — a life so kindly, so earnest, so charitable, and furnishing such a true and splendid example to those left upon life's battlefield — that field where fought so staunchly for the right, Michael Freebern Gavin, wise physician, Christian gentleman, and faithful friend.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS

I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to read a number of letters this last summer, which my father had written, and from them, I have taken the quotations that follow. He was a man of few words, especially on thoughts or principles of his own, and I cannot recall his ever expressing his views, in conversation, on his profession or on any general principles or conclusions of life. So it is with the greatest pleasure that I have found, and can publish, these free expressions of his ideas on so many subjects, and in his own distinctive, clear style.

It must be remembered that these extracts were merely written in, almost between the lines, so to speak, in letters dealing with other general matters, to my mother, to myself, or to intimate friends, and with no thought on my father's part of "giving advice," or of expressing his ideas, other than to those who were in harmony with them. To find even as many of these thoughts of his as are given here, required a reading of all his letters that could be found; and the choice was made with a view to show his ideas and thoughts on all the subjects on which he had given expression to them.

I would ask the reader to bear this in mind in

Digitized by Google

reading the second and third of the quotations, for in letter after letter I find phrases like, "I must have been interrupted a half a dozen times since starting this letter"; or "There, I must stop now, for I have to go out to see a very sick patient."

It has not proved an easy task to group these various excerpts under different headings, and I have made only a semblance of so doing — but still I think the order will make but little difference in the pleasure of reading them.

I would say again that I consider it most fortunate and a great privilege to have found these quotations and to have been able to publish them.

BASIL GAVIN.

SOUTH BOSTON, MASS.
October 31, 1915.

Digitized by Google

My dear Wife

Late yesterday afternoon just about twilight when there was no person in the house but Mamie and self the door bell rang when in walked a large muscular man, of Negro complexion accompanied by a small impish looking Dwarf of dark complexion but muscular looking when looked at closely. The pair walked into my office, the door closed both both stood close together. I began to feel as if my visitors were not all right, their visit seemed to mean something more than some

Digitized by Google

for him. He assumed the room closely more particularly timely before addressing me. The Elder began by saying that he called to settle an old score with me. Pray what- might it be I asked, but his direct answer was given in word & getting up he walked towards where I sat with his teeth clinched and his countenance of the most savage & determined kind he attempted to seize upon me saying that he would punish me. I jumped up and dodged his grasp when he tried to strike me, using my tongue and utmost any possibility of help. I determined to fight for life, all this time the black dwarf kept looked with a devilish grin of satisfaction on his countenance feeling no doubt

Digitized by Google

his companion needed no help.
after some skirmishing this
great muscular savage seized
me pressing out my very
life when I reached over to
the drawer and was able to
seize upon an instrument
which from a knowledge of
anatomy I was able to use
to my great advantage slaying
this huge monster between life
and death and relieving my-
self from his grasp to find
myself now attacked by the
unpick working black & pumpkin
dwarf who seized upon one of
my legs and climbed upon my
body like a huge
snake. In self defence I was
obliged to kill him when
worn out and ready to faint
from exhaustion I heard a
knock at the office door when

Digitized by Google

in & called Maria who
heard the unusual noise

and came up to see what
it all meant. I told her
the whole story and asked
what ought to be done. The
Dr was dead and his com-
panion dying very fast for
he was not able to speak

The situation was becoming
unbearable when the bell rang
and Wolfe went out of the room to
find that it was all in
order — two nice or horrible
men. I met Dom Karl last
evening at Parkers when he
was going to dine with Miss
Kellogg. He spoke of the bride
and groom & said it was well
they were married as he was
very jealous of his wife before
marriage — with a great deal of love
about me — Mr & Mrs

Wed. — Saw Lucile & had a little story

Digitized by Google

On Writing Letters

I suppose writing is next to talking.

It is seldom that I find opportunity to write a letter of any length without being interrupted by callers, and this must account for the disjointed appearance of my letters to you.

I always write hurriedly, and seldom re-read my letters or anything else I write.

Long, long ago, I found out how hard it is to write an interesting letter, a letter of any kind except one of dry facts regarding business, unless we are in the mood, in sympathy with what we are engaged in doing. And, after all, we ask, what is this thing called mood, sympathy, or any other name you may please, but really liking the work for the work's sake? There are times when one can chat to the very paper one is writing upon, knowing that it will be carried safely to the party it is intended for.

Please write as you think and feel.

We generally write about that which is uppermost in our minds — in fact we talk almost the same way too, — so I shall begin by telling you, . . .

Nature

Just now we are having delightful weather. Oh, such weather makes us enjoy everything in Nature. In no country that I know of is there such charming weather as we have between the seasons of autumn and winter.

Digitized by Google

Everything is green and suggests spring and youth.

There is something very nice in a bouquet of handsome flowers — more particularly in midwinter, when all else in nature is so dreary.

Of course March is not a very pleasant month, but it brings us nearer, even in name, to spring.

I love the autumn season, as we see it in New England, — a love tinged with a sadness that such changes should accompany decay.

The weather has been very cold for three days, and you know how much I enjoy cold, and consequently how happy I must be under existing circumstances. 'T is no use in finding fault though, — we will enjoy the fine weather when we get it.

I told him of my project of trying to induce the birds (not tame ones) to make their home in this particular garden, with a promise of protection on my part, and on theirs a promise to sing.

To bed at 11 — up at 2, and home at 6. I must confess I enjoyed the morning, though I did not enjoy going out. The rapidity with which light followed dawn was really surprising, while the view in the East was really charming, — so suggestive of mystery.

We had a terrible northeast snowstorm to-day. I had to walk a long way this evening to see a patient, and while doing so, I was so strongly reminded of all beauties in this world by the mere absence of them.

The redeeming feature of long winters is, that the nights are long, affording excellent opportunity for reading.

Digitized by Google

Of late we have had beautiful clear blue skies, with handsome clouds for a foreground — things I enjoy so much, and never to be looked at without our thoughts wandering far beyond the limits of this earth. Of all sciences astronomy affords the greatest field for the imagination, in fact it is boundless. One thought suggests another till the whole becomes at last so intricate, that we must try and forget all about them.

We have so little spring in New England, that one has to take the opportunity when it offers and not wait, otherwise we fail to see the fruit-blossoms. Nature itself seems to live a short and "fast life" giving a bad example to too-willing human nature. This might serve as a philosophical explanation of our American tendency to live life at high pressure and die soon.

The woods I enjoy best — where I can tramp free and use my gun.

One loves to get away at times from the work of man, and revel in the work of nature, so wonderful and full of beauty that we become lost for the time being. When I drive in the country I am always struck with amazement at the greatness of God, the harmony in all things that surround us, the provision made for preserving plants, as well as animals. In fact, we know so little of the wonderful secrets of nature, that we are the veriest children.

HABITS — TASTES

Yesterday was a very busy day with me, from 5 A.M. until 9 P.M. — was just as busy as a bee.

Digitized by Google

For years back, I have had more than my share of the good things of the world; plenty to do, more money than I wanted, and all the patients I wished to care for. (1874.)

I have been busy all week, so much so that, even with my love of music, I did not go to hear the opera at the Boston Theatre.

What can be more charming than that little Garden Song in Faust, or the many beautiful songs in the operas of Don Giovanni or Trovatore?

I think of going to the Club dinner to-morrow night, as the election of officers takes place. There are so many nice gentlemen to meet, and, as a rule, the conversation is sparkling and rich with information, so that it does one good occasionally, and brightens one's ideas and gives one food for thought.

There is a great pleasure in sitting down in a comfortable room amongst books, when we have done the work for the day satisfactorily. As an old smoker, I would add a cigar also, and some person to talk or read at, to the picture.

My fire in the grate takes the place of a companion.

I have not read much outside my profession this summer, but I hope to do so soon. What real pleasure there is in a good book! be it a novel of the good class, or something more substantial. The long winter nights, cosy, well-heated and lighted rooms, a good book and cigar, go far towards making us like the world as it is.

Digitized by Google

I generally spend my evenings reading, go to bed early and get up early; in this respect, following natural laws.

We reached Providence a few minutes before 6 o'clock, when it was as bright and clear as noon-day. I could not avoid thinking just then how much of the day we let pass, without using it. I use the plural number to represent myself — a great habit, by the way, of those who write for newspapers, not intending to include others.

Quiet colors look well, don't attract attention, and remain in fashion longer.

"99" is convenient, comfortable, modest, and large enough for a home.

I regret so much the want of time to prepare for our trip — I should be so much pleased to derive all that such a trip can afford to a person of education.

A poorish dinner with good company, is *almost* all we want.

I must say that I have no great love for parties where nothing but mere conventional rules are observed.

There is great pleasure in giving presents to young children. So much so, that it far offsets the cost of the presents. I know of no greater pleasure than watching the delight of young children when they get a pleasant toy.

Digitized by Google

To have adults take part in such games, adds to the enjoyment of the children. Indeed, I am child-like enough to enjoy such fun about as much as the little ones.

I always had a great dread of being in debt, as it makes me feel that I ought to have no rest until I see the end of it.

What a bad investment that was, but no use now to regret it.

Of course there is quarreling about tastes. Some base their taste upon well-recognized laws of the blending of colors, harmony, etc. Others please the eye (their own eye), and so on; but there are so many things that ought to be considered: size of the room, light, height of ceiling, color of the floor, shape of the room, etc. I believe my taste differs from many, and to tell the truth, I am not sorry. I do not like to copy Tom, Dick, and Harry, in anything.

Good taste is a variable article, and that which would be considered good taste in a grand and elegant mansion, would be totally unfit and the worst of taste in a small modest house.

How much I long to see Venice, that most wonderful of cities, with its curious history, its wonderful people and their greatness, the buildings and fine arts; lastly, to see that sky and water of which we all have heard so much.

About the dog question: I will sell him, first, because he kept rooting up the garden, second, not pure breed, and you know that I don't like imitations or mongrels of any sort.

Digitized by Google

I like aphorisms because they express so much in so few words.

My friend, Mr. O'Reilly, called to see me the other night. I always enjoy his visits, — so full of interesting talk and so bright and genial.

I have been acting scribe for my friend, Mr. O'Reilly, now away on vacation. He is editor of the Boston *Pilot.*

Reading

Reading is to me the greatest of pleasures, even when I do not derive benefit from it.

Seldom have I read a book, without getting a hint from it for some other book.

I have been reading Hawthorne's *Twice Told Tales;* a very pretty name expressing about the truth. . . . I like Hawthorne's writing, and it was some years since I had read any of his writings, not since I was in the Army (if I except the *Scarlet Letter*), but I like him even more now. There is something weird, supernatural, in most of his writings, and the style is simple and pure. I have heard the man was just like his writing, strange, not like other men, a riddle to his neighbors.

I have read Charles Lamb's writings, but the *Essays of Elia* are the best written by him; indeed, I doubt if there is anything to surpass them in English.

I have just commenced to read *Eugene Aram* by Lytton, and like all of his books I enjoy it.

Digitized by Google

I am getting along very well with the *Conquest of Mexico* — the style is charming, and to me it has opened up a mine of information regarding the Spanish in America.

I have been reading *Adam Bede* by George Eliot. Such a thoughtful woman and one who writes so wisely that we wonder where she got all her wisdom. It requires considerable time to read her stories with profit.

Some of Bret Harte's prose stories are so pleasing that I often read them over to find myself dropping a tear over the page.

As I write I am struck with the beautiful sentiment expressed so well by Shakespeare from the calendar for to-day: "God shall be my help — my stay — my guide and lantern to my feet." What could be more tersely and beautifully expressed.

[Stevenson.] He writes well and has a style unlike any other writer that I am acquainted with, and I rather enjoyed some of his stories.

In such an excellent book as *Middlemarch* there is a great deal of sound information, good common sense, and a spirit of making us look on the bright side of things.

I like Thackeray, Scott, Lever, and some others, but this is about all [novels]. I like Lord Lytton very much, never grow tired of reading his stories.

Of the poets I must say I like Scott the best, and I suppose it is because there is so much ring and rhyme to his poems.

Digitized by Google

Read "W's" poem in the paper I sent you to-day. It is a beautiful little thing, and the man who wrote it is a true-born poet.

When I get through writing, I will take up some book. When I become interested in a book I am satisfied.

I have been reading and smoking; agreeable occupations to me.

The men or women who write really good books will, at all times, deserve the thanks of the many.

Medicine

Ever since I began to practise medicine, I have held a position in some hospital, and now I find it almost a necessity. It is so pleasant to go in and chat with the sick, make them laugh when we can, say a kind word, and when it is necessary to give bad news, do so in the easiest way possible.

A blinding snowstorm without. If we do sacrifice personal feelings at times, we are rewarded by kindly feelings on the part of those we visit. This was particularly the case to-night with me, and I feel so happy now that I have done my duty.

To be busy is to be happy after all, and I like nothing better than having a great deal to do. I do not like outside business, that is, business not belonging to my profession.

Indeed, with me, I suppose, work will become, if it has not already done so, part of my existence.

Digitized by Google

Was out late last night, from twelve to half-past three A.M. Of course the going out was not very pleasant, but once over, I enjoyed my work all the more.

To look forward to one who will always encourage my efforts in trying to be a little above the commonplace in my profession, to make my work not a mere work of gain, but a means of doing good, a something worthy of all our best efforts.

If there are unpleasant things in a physician's life, — and what life is free from such, — there are countless balancing things.

I am just called off to South Boston Point. There is no doubt about such calls being disagreeable when one gets in a very comfortable office, with books to read, and cigars to smoke. Why, a saint would be provoked at such an uncalled-for visit; but I suppose it is no use to find fault; — do our duty and we shall be better pleased.

The medical profession has one great feature that its twin fellow, the law, has not; viz: a doctor's education is not for any one race or clime, but is universal. People have the same sort of sickness in Italy that we have here, or in England, with only some trivial complaints that have some local peculiarity.

Yesterday I was kept so busy all day that I only got through an operation (cutting a leg off) in time to dine at 7 and to find, when I reached home, calls enough to keep me engaged till after 11. Again to-day I was out at 4 this morning, but managed to hear 6 o'clock Mass, and dined with Father O'Callaghan at one.

Digitized by Google

Common sense is the greatest attribute for a physician to be possessed of — or, in fact, for a man in any line of work, whatever it may be.

There are times when I grow so tired and weary of seeing, and hearing the stories, of sick people, that I could wish to be in some place where sickness was an undiscovered thing. I suppose, though, I would not stop very long in such a land, allowing that such existed. Everything about my life is so bound up in my profession, that to live outside it would scarcely be possible.

There is great pleasure in doing work because the work in itself is good or because we can relieve suffering and pain, or because we gain the good-will and esteem of the people, — the more so when such work is done at great personal sacrifice or because of the love or ambition of doing an act which implies a more than ordinary knowledge. But to be obliged to do such work for the mere gain and because such gain was necessary, is anything but agreeable.

Religion

In hearing the Gospel of to-day I was greatly impressed with the man-like action of Christ when he came to Gethsemane: — he told those with him to remain with him — that he felt sad. Knowing what was coming, the separation from his followers made him sad. How human — just like what any one might wish.

I was once a witness of an outbreak of that terrible disease (cholera) when I saw people in the full vigor of life stricken with death in a few hours, and buried

Digitized by Google

without an hour's delay. *There was proof* of the insignificance of man, and the greatness of the incomprehensible God.

To carry out the rules of the Church is not hard; but I do believe in doing more, that is by trying to carry out the spirit of the rule, as well as the exact rule.

Yesterday evening was quiet, and I spent a couple of hours in reading Parables in the Bible. I felt, as I read them, that men are now as they were thousands of years ago when this part of the Bible was written, and require very much the same sort of government to make them do right. Indeed, one is apt to think that in those days when men were under a simpler form of government than now, they would not require a system of laws like ours; but after all, it is surprising how much the human race resemble one another no matter what the clime may be, or where they live.

I sometimes ask myself — will those who suffer in this world, and that suffering not from their own act, be treated in the hereafter as we who suffer not at all? or will that all-seeing God bring into play some law of compensation?

As I look at the world, each of us has a particular rôle to play in helping the poor, comforting the widow or orphan, relieving the sufferings of the sick or destitute. This means always offers of doing good and deserving a reward from God.

It is too bad that X—— should worry or fret over the will of God. Of course, it is very easy to see that such trouble so early in life is a great deal — but it might be worse, a great deal worse, and God has seen

Digitized by Google

fit to send it. At best, life is but the smallest atom of time, and the difference between two lives cannot be much. 'T is a way we all must go, sooner or later, and that being the case we ought to try and look at death calmly.

If the worst comes, you must simply bear it as the divine will of a good Providence, who does all things for the best, even when we think the decree hard, unbearable.

The religious life (be it followed by man or woman) is so far above any other life in this world, that to my mind no comparison can be made between it and any other. To completely fill such a life, we must have enthusiasm and the noblest of ambitions, to work for God in every way, at every hour of life. I suppose you would call it vocation. To become a religious or a priest, etc., from any other motive, robs such a life of all its happiness. Perhaps my views are too radical, but if such a standard was adhered to, I think it would be — for the best.

ADVICE

Take the world easily; don't rush at everything, and more enjoyment and contentment will be your lot.

The quotation "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof" ought to be written in letters of gold and always be before us. If we always practised that rule, what an amount of unnecessary fret and anxiety many in the world would be saved!

Do not expect too much from a child of his age. First try and get him to understand what is right and wrong. Don't bribe him to do things by giving him

Digitized by Google

what he may want. You must try and make him *wish* to come and see you, by telling him stories or whatever innocent things you know he likes. This is different from having him obey you; don't even bribe him to carry out your order; this he *must* do. You have got to learn how to govern and bring up a child. Try, above all things, to have the child do what you want him to do, not from fear, but because you tell him to do it.

It is much the best way, if things or people do not suit us, to avoid them as much as possible.

Don't talk too much — think before you speak, and allow for a difference of opinions in all matters. You will find this the best way to get along and in many cases, have your own way in the end — So much for advice.

The less said on the subject, the better. 'T is well not to talk over disagreeable things, unless good can come from it.

Observe things and persons as you pass along, and you will soon find your store of information increase in size.

— and let me add, enjoy your visit with "abandon," as the French say, and don't be thinking of the morrow, for, figuratively speaking, God only knows where we will be on the morrow.

One learns, by not speaking at all times, to hear other people's ideas.

Digitized by Google

I would not anticipate trouble, but be happy when you can. Take things as they come, and don't make yourself unhappy without good reason. Don't look too much to the future.

No matter what any one else does, that is no excuse for your *not* doing what is right.

Give the world credit for having good as well as bad, sincere as well as false; and, with Holy Writ, "sufficient for the day, is the evil thereof."

Miscellaneous

A short letter again — want of time must be my excuse.

Habit has more to do with our everyday life than we are willing to acknowledge.

I never think of being sick, catching a disease, or being afraid of disease; but to others, nearest and dearest, the idea of their being sick is something not to be thought of.

The hardest trials of this world come when we have to part with father or mother.

Poor human nature is always looking for changes.

Trouble comes to all of us early enough, and often enough without anticipating or making it.

My pen is new and stiff; like a recent acquaintance.

Digitized by Google

A woman, with her finer insight, when she *thinks*, reads human nature more correctly than a man.

How different the world looks when we are not feeling well; the allotted three-score and ten is quite all one wants.

When we are forewarned of things disagreeable, the mind accommodates itself and does not feel the shock so much as when unexpected.

I think that I would make a very bad patient, so I often thank God that he has blessed me with so little bodily suffering.

Then it will lose its novelty, and go unheeded, like all things in this world.

You must tell your father that I wish him many happy returns, and the continual blessings of a beneficent God.

I hope you will have a pleasant trip over. It is so pleasant for those who have friends to meet them, to look forward to the time they will reach land, and even those who have not friends, make friends of the strange land and customs.

A good old coat has many attractions for me, like an old friend, to be held on to, until there is nothing left. I don't know that the comparison is a good one, but if an old coat could talk, what tales might be told, what secrets unfolded, gala-days recalled, etc.!

It has always seemed to me that a present bore a resemblance to the giver; but it is not the present so

Digitized by Google

much as the spirit that goes with it. To the giver, there is as much enjoyment as to those who get presents.

No thoughtful person can look at the present condition of public morals in this country without a feeling of anxiety for the future. Where money can buy men's votes, you must expect cheating, and the man with the biggest purse to win.

There are few habits that cannot be overcome by patience.

I consider it a great source of care and anxiety of mind to have much wealth to look after.

My great *bête-noir* has been a feeling that at some time in my life, I might, through sickness, become disabled to practise my profession, and be thrown upon my family for support.

There are two well-marked classes of people in the world: those who never can see anything but sunshine and pleasure, and those who in the brightest day are looking for clouds and storm. No doubt the world is to each of us, as we make it, pleasant or dreary.

When one is sick, the world becomes almost unbearable, and it is then easy to see the wisdom of Providence in so ordaining it, that we should live so long and no longer.

The more one observes and puts down what his observations are, the better they become.

I think it is hardly possible for a person of culture to see things done, without making some inquiry, so

Digitized by Google

that it is not till they are called upon to fill a position, that they find out how much information they can justly lay claim to.

One thing I try to avoid is, to confound novelty with good taste as so many persons do.

I was not at all curious to know what had been said about me, believing there are many things that do us no good by hearing.

I tried to-day to select some little present for you — but after spending over an hour in a fruitless effort, I gave it up. J. thought I was very particular, and perhaps I am, for all I know — but I must feel that an article is just the thing before I can buy it.

We can get over anything but sickness and death.

But what a difference in the conversation of different men. Some talk with a feeling that it is their duty to say something, altho' it may mean nothing, others are only willing to talk when conversant with the subject-matter. I am bound to confess that the latter are the sort of persons I like best, for to hear a man talk upon a subject he knows nothing of — I won't say it.

It seems natural for us to look for death when our relatives have reached or nearly reached the allotted age; but when death comes long before the prime of life is reached, it is hard to bear up against it, when the victim is some person we have dearly loved.

I am glad that you are enjoying your trip. Change does good to most people and to none more than those

Digitized by Google

who, while at home, see little company. It must be so pleasant to meet one's own relations. After a separation — to talk on the past and present and even look into the future, meet acquaintances, and see familiar things. I have experienced all these feelings and much more. How quickly time is wiped away and forgotten under such circumstances.

I am very much inclined to look on the morrow, but I always try and find out the brightest side of the morrow.

By the way, I have no hesitation in saying that most of us think of time too much and not enough of enjoyments. It seems to me that we ought to work with all our powers while engaged in work, and after it is done forget all about it, and time too. I don't know though that I practice all I preach, neither do I do all I tell my patients to do.

How short the entire Christian era appears when we look at it as representing 18 lives. You know many persons live to reach the age of 100 years. Taking 18 such persons, number one would have lived in the time of our Lord, and when Imperial Rome ruled the world.

I have long since learned that those who leave home to visit are so engaged with their friends, that writing home is something of an afterthought. How pleased you must be to visit home again!! I can well imagine your feelings, judged by my own, in the times gone by. The very thought of being home again, the nearing home when I could hardly contain myself, and the sight of my own family and the things of the past, things of memory, which time can never efface.

Digitized by Google

You know there are very few things in this life, a knowledge of which does not imply the loss of time or money.

What a strange compound this human nature is, always ready to shirk our duty!

Your letter and book reached me to-day — I thank you for both — the latter shows how thoughtful you are. Indeed, it is not as a rule the cost of a present that makes us think the less or more of it, but the mere fact of one's friends recollecting such things, is, in itself, a present worth getting.

Sooner or later every one of us must meet with rain, clouds, and thunder-storms, for on our planet all these things occur to all; but because we anticipate such, is no reason for carrying a long face, a gingham umbrella, water-proof, and overshoes all the time.

Nothing makes up for the loss of health.

The last month — the last week — the last day of the year — after to-day, 1882 will be of the past — a something that was — like all things in the world. How strange to think of such things — never, never again to see this year!

When I think of those I am called to see, the suffering from pain and death, I sometimes wonder at myself for being so cheerful and thinking so much about this world.

With all my efforts to train myself in that stern school of philosophy which allows us to look at misfortune, defeat, disaster, and disappointment as things

Digitized by Google

beyond our own control, and not to be regretted, I am as unable to bear up against sad news as a child of 10 years.

I suppose it is all for the best, so I don't mean to think of it again.

I have often thought that one of the secrets of securing happiness in this world is that of trying to find out what others would like to do; such acts being a two-fold pleasure, that in the act itself, and that of the person for whom we do it. Don't you think I am a philosopher on a small scale?

Yes, it is very hard that people should suffer so, but God has so ordained it.

I have educated myself in the way of not thinking of bad news while any doubt exists.

It does seem to me that the key to happiness in this world is to engage in some good work, earnestly, follow it up, and do what Americans call "our level best," when rest of mind at the good we have done is sure to follow.

I think there are very few persons in this world who fully recognize the great boon of good health, until they have an attack of illness. It is like one's liberty, — we know nothing of it until we are deprived of it.

I am quite willing to agree with what you say of being good and doing good to our fellow-man or woman, but I do not believe that this bright world, with its countless objects of beauty, was made other than for the enjoyment of those sent to inhabit it.

Digitized by Google

It does seem to me, as if all of us ought to do our duty pleasantly and willingly; for without responsibilities, cares, and duty, our lives would not be worth the effort to prolong our existence twenty-four hours.

Some of the wise men of old have said that time passes by quickly with those who are happy.

Indeed, there are more ways in this world of making happiness than most people dream of.

Everybody must expect crosses, but we ought to thank God for his kindness and goodness to us.

There is a great deal of happiness in knowing and feeling that we have done a good work, without at all taking into account the fact of giving so much pleasure to those who are sadly in need of such kindness.

I have not much to say, in answer to your long letter of yesterday. In many things I agree with you. In some few I differ. Of course, I am conscious of the fact that certain acts are, to my way of looking at things, not honorable, nay, anything but honorable. But what is the use of saying anything about it and letting people know that you feel so, when there is no remedy. I don't know that *any person* knows my feelings about certain things. I have supreme contempt for meanness in any shape. To my idea of right and just, I have always adhered when to do differently would mean additional coppers, etc. I am glad 't is so. I would not have it otherwise if I could. I feel now, and I thank God for it, that as long as my health continues good, I can always make more than enough to support my household.

Digitized by Google

By and by, when I have reached the millennium, the *dolce far niente*, I shall be glad. — Who knows?

There is so much pleasure in putting one's self out a little bit for the *personal* sake, and also in doing so because *it is good in itself*.

As I write, we are having one of the fiercest snowstorms of the winter. The fire-alarm bells are ringing, the sky is red; the streets are crowded with men and women running towards a great fire in South Boston. How little the world and all it contains becomes in the time of adversity or calamity. The insignificance of man and all his work becomes as nothing at such times.

I could not help thinking this evening of the terrible night when all Boston was out and it seemed as if the entire city was to be burned. Never before was I so fully impressed with the frailty of man. His insignificance and that of his work were so apparent, that I really trembled.

I have often thought of the great blessing God gives so many in good health, and how few there are who appreciate it, even stop to think that good health in itself is the greatest of all happiness.

Responsibility brings pleasure as well as duty to fulfill; and were it not for such things, all of us would at some time or other suffer from that worst of enemies to happiness, *ennui*.

What is more miserable in this life than not to have work to do?

Digitized by Google

All of us, both men and women, have a duty to do; and he or she who does his duty willingly and with pleasure, taking it as the gift of God, enjoys the greatest amount of happiness in this world.

To know that one's friends think well of one, is a great deal.

Everything in the world has a grain of good in it.

If the death of those we love dearly causes us pain, it likewise has its counterpart in reconciling our mind when death approaches by making us anxious to meet those gone before us to the unknown world beyond the grave.

I suppose there are few of us who are not more or less ideal in our notions of life, and I do not see any fault in this, for it is well known that the ideal is the brightest picture we can make, while to try to attain that, in practice, must be good and bring happiness.

Yes, we have only to look around and see the positions of others, to make us enjoy those blessings which God has given us.

Every person has experienced the pleasure it gives to do an act of kindness; in itself, full repayment for the work done.

I cannot see how people can live and be happy without constant occupation of mind and body.

I have always looked on the excuse — want of time — as rather a lame one, believing that all of us can find time to do what duty calls us to do.

Digitized by Google

To stop at the half-way-house without making an effort to go beyond it, to be satisfied with the common everyday average of success, is the lot of most men unless they have a good and brave wife, who encourages them to keep up the good fight.

Work, as long as it is good and to our liking, does more to make one happy than anything else in the world.

I have always had more or less of the ideal in my views of life, and I always mean to try and reach that point, although it is possible I shall often fall short of it.

There is a great deal of what is good and kind in human nature and it takes only a little to call it forth. I would much rather be imposed upon by giving the good side to human nature, than always to look doubtful, and call in question the motives of others. If there is doubt at all, throw it on the charitable side; for afterwards, if things are contrary to what we wish, we have the satisfaction of knowing that our motives were good.

The world would be very bad, if we only did for ourselves. Selfishness is a pretty bad feeling for any one to be possessed with; nay, it is one of the worst faults we could possess.

I have always tried my best to be what other people took me for, feeling that a nature like mine required straightforwardness and friendship. With such a purpose constantly before me, I feel so much better in doing all within my power to show myself worthy of the esteem of my friends; for to be all that our friends take us for is a great deal.

Digitized by Google

MICHAEL FREEBERN GAVIN

The infinite number of ways in which we may do good is to me another evidence of the goodness of God.

What an untold pleasure it must be to those people who have done so much for the poor, when their end is near, to look back at the good they have done!

THE END

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google